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# Reflections

Robert Silverberg

The newspapers around here are still full of funny stuff. Last month it was the push-and-pull over research toward development of an AIDS vaccine vs. the lawyers' insistence that the researchers be made vulnerable to heavy liability penalties if anything goes wrong as a result of their experiments. This time around, the Terrifying Ozone Problem is the situation we need to confront. The trouble is that we can't be sure whether the problem is too much ozone or too little. It all depends on which day's newspaper you read.

Scary Story #1 came from *The Los Angeles Times*. Los Angeles is a city where the air is full of strange substances hostile to life much of the time, and the inhabitants understandably keep close watch on what's going on in their atmosphere. Imagine their delight when their local paper let them know, one smoggy morning in August of 1986, that air-pollution experts, who have come to regard ozone as one of the most dangerous of pollutants, are beginning to believe that the current national clean air standard for permissible ozone content of the atmosphere may be providing little or no margin of health safety. Since peak ozone concentrations in the Los Angeles basin frequently reach three times the current allowable standard already, that's alarming news for the Angelenos.

The *Times* article goes into disturbing detail about what breathing ozone can do to you. It reveals U.S. Environ-

mental Protection Agency findings that an exposure to ozone concentrations of only 0.02 parts per million parts of air — one-sixth the permissible Clean Air Act standard — will decrease lung function by 1.6% during light exercise, 2.4% during moderate exercise, 4.7% during very heavy exercise. At the allowed 0.12 ppm concentration, healthy males may experience a 10% drop in respiratory function. Exposure to higher ozone levels — such as are common in the Los Angeles area — can produce chest pain, coughing, nausea, severely impaired lung function of an irreversible kind, and possible injury to the immune system. And so on: a long litany of bad news for anyone who breathes Los Angeles air regularly.

(It should be noted in passing that the *Times* article, which is quite thorough on the topic of ozone's harmful effects, is damnably vague in the matter of telling us what ozone *is*. It calls ozone "the principal component of smog," which is true, and explains that "ozone is formed in the lower atmosphere when emissions of hydrocarbons, such as unburned fuel and paint vapors, react in sunlight with products of combustion known as oxides of nitrogen. The pungent, colorless, toxic gas accounts for 95% of what is commonly called smog." An uninformed reader will probably conclude from this that ozone is simply one of the many nasty chemicals formed by the mysterious industrial processes of the modern era, and will

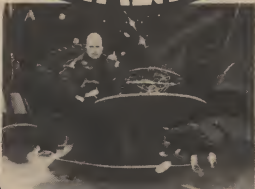
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call for bigger and better ozone filters to be put on power plant smokestacks and automobile tail pipes. But in fact what ozone is is oxygen. An *allotropic* form of oxygen: that is, one with an internal bonding arrangement slightly different from the common form. Ordinary oxygen molecules consist of two atoms of oxygen; an ozone molecule contains three. Ozone is formed naturally in the Earth's upper atmosphere by the photochemical action of solar ultraviolet radiation, and is transported by atmospheric turbulence to the lower levels where we do our breathing. It is also formed unnaturally, as the *Times* notes, by the workings of the internal combustion engine. Except in highly industrialized areas, there is relatively little of it in our air, which is just as well, because it is truly corrosive stuff. It is used commercially as a bleaching and sterilizing agent and in air-conditioning systems.)

While the denizens of Hollywood began to fret about the quantity of ozone they were inhaling with each breath — and doubtless were getting ready to demand that the government, or somebody, launch a crash program to rid our planet of the dreaded molecule within sixty days — *The Wall Street Journal* a day later showed up with bad news of an equal but opposite nature. The Earth is facing calamity, we learned, not from too much ozone but from too little. The activities of man are destroying the layer of ozone that blankets our world!

This virtuous substance is the same one — O<sub>3</sub> — that is currently so threatening to the joggers of Beverly Hills. But it is ozone that is located in the *upper* atmosphere: a natural insulating layer that screens our world from deadly ultraviolet rays. Because the ozone is up there absorbing destructive solar radiation, we are protected

against skin cancer, genetic mutations, and other radiation-induced annoyances.

But the upper-atmosphere ozone is vanishing, gobbled up by chlorofluorocarbon molecules used as spray-can propellants and as refrigerants. Every squirt of the aerosol can, it seems, releases chlorofluorocarbons, which are stable molecules that drift into the upper atmosphere and cause chemical reactions destructive to ozone. (The chlorofluorocarbons also heighten the "greenhouse effect," which is expected to raise global temperatures over the next few decades by trapping the heat that the Earth radiates from its surface into the atmosphere.) The United States government, made aware of this situation some time back, banned the use of chlorofluorocarbons in spray cans in 1978. But the rest of the world did not follow our example, and aerosol use is rising at a fast clip there. And though aerosol cans are banned here, other uses for chlorofluorocarbons continue: in car air conditioners and fast-food packaging.

The damage to the ozone layer that these chlorofluorocarbons were thought capable of causing is now evidently being detected, in spades. Stratospheric ozone over the Antarctic has decreased so sharply, says one University of California scientist, that "now we've got a hole in our atmosphere that you could see from Mars." Aside from the huge Antarctic ozone hole, general global ozone levels are dropping too: NASA weather-satellite data shows a 2.5% reduction in the last seven years. A further drop of 3% in the next fifteen years over the northern United States is predicted if chlorofluorocarbon use remains at present levels.

Greenhouse-effect problems and increased mutation levels sound like





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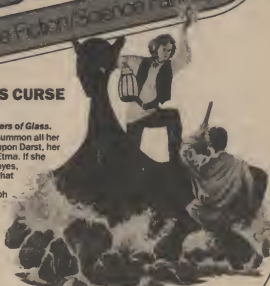
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science fiction to most people, and they aren't apt to worry much about them. (Unless that abstract-sounding "mutation level" label translates itself into birth defects for someone in his own family.) But Environmental Protection Agency officials estimate that each 1% drop in atmospheric ozone could add 20,000 skin cancer cases annually in the United States — another bit of troublesome news for all those Los Angeles sun-worshippers.

Poor Los Angeles! Too *much* ozone in the *lower* atmosphere brings the risk of severe respiratory problems, nausea, and immune-system changes. Too *little* ozone in the *upper* atmosphere brings skin cancer and genetic damage. Pumping the extra ozone upward from where it's in surplus to where it's needed does not seem to be a practical solution. Poor Los Angeles!

And poor all the rest of us, too. We can, if we choose, ignore what's going on in Los Angeles, just as we can shrug off the ozone hole over Antarctica by pointing out that there aren't many sun-bathers in danger of skin cancer down there. But it's all one planet, and what goes around comes around. We have two ozone problems at once here, a simultaneous surplus and a shortage, and they don't cancel each other out. What they may very well cancel out, if nothing is done soon, is *us*.

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# Inflections

## The Readers

Dear Mr. Price,

Like George Greiff whose letter appeared in the [September 1986] issue, I, too, left SF magazines when they first departed from their audience with the junk called New Wave. I felt betrayed and, in too large a degree, we are still betrayed. SF began its life as an embodiment of hope. Today, as well, any story which makes the reader feel worse after he has read it is a traitor.

SF has lost its highest, best purpose when it takes on the color of malaise and despair. And the only people who will herald it are the people who, living in the cellar, wish to draw others to share their decadence.

If you argue that more people are now in despair, it does not follow that you, or other editors, should feed them in kind. Even their spirits can be and are lifted by appropriate stories which may begin in despair but rise out of it at least to hope, if not to victory. A basic understanding of this principle has lead already to the successes of Lucas, Spielberg, Howard, and others. The greatest hits are never New Wave!

I will not deny that "The Tyrant That I Serve" is well written, but it is a downer, an abysmal downer. From fire and ashes, the anti-hero becomes "glory be" only humanly bored.

By all means, Ms. Ore, write, write well, get published, and feel good about it. It seems that you accurately gauged the level you had to fall to, and I have no quarrel with your skill. But I truly hope that the viewpoint of pain

that you depict is not pain that you share and thus write out of. Likewise, I hope that it was not a sharing of actual pain that so thrilled our beloved editor.

Ultimately, it is unfair of me to use "The Tyrant That I Serve" as the worst example, since it is much less gross and downtrending than so many other stories. Nevertheless, the buck must stop somewhere, and somewhere the downturn has got to stop. The more you rely on downers and New Wave, the less readers you have. The largest part of the reading public has voted and continues to vote by not buying or not continuing to buy.

We can write about the sad, the grim, the painful. We can write about decadence and evils great and small, but we have done nothing of value if nowhere can anyone glimpse a fair prospect. The great may fall, but if you have shown them truly great, then there is still hope they may rise again. Do not look for a large market for despair and the deficient — there has never really been one.

Sincerely,  
Janetta Schuch  
3621 Westmont N.  
Oklahoma City OK 73118

*Not trying to second-guess the intentions of the author, Janetta, we feel that you have missed the point of "The Tyrant That I Serve." After the pain and struggle of his love/hate relationship with Shelley, Ariban must learn to cope with his own existence, which is the only*

thing he cannot escape. If at first he's not satisfied, it's because he's learning to deal with the responsibility and accountability of his own life.

As for what you call "downers," well, they've always been an aspect of science-fiction literature — even long before the so-called New Wave movement. The War of the Worlds by H. G. Wells is a very early and very fine example. Hope, yes; that was in the novel, but bacteria, not mankind, caused the demise of the Martians. So, should we not read Wells because man is not always in control of his destiny, of the pain and despair in his life? We shouldn't think so.

— Patrick Lucien Price

Dear Mr. Price,

I read your "Refractions" column in the September issue of *Amazing*® *Stories* and note that you are hoping to get a better feel for the tastes of your readers. So if you want feedback, I thought I could give you some. . . .

I have been reading your magazine since George Scithers took it over, and I have saved all the issues. From this, you can guess that I've enjoyed them. I particularly appreciated the humor and the "Improbable Bestiary" poems, but there was a lot to like outside of those categories. And I applaud your intention of adding more hard or speculative SF (that was my first love) to the mixture. The space fantasy ought to be fun, too, if well done.

Militaristic SF is something else, though. One of the real joys of SF is learning that the BEM has a point of view that may be as logical as the hero's. Most militaristic SF I've seen reduces the alien to a one-dimensional bit of cannon fodder. Much less interesting and enjoyable, at least to me. Admittedly, the current scene has me somewhat more allergic than usual to the militaristic [element]. It's the thing

which threatens to drag some kids I care about down to Nicaragua to be filled full of holes all so that some aging grade-B movie actor-turned-politician can prove how macho he is. Not to mention that it's the thing that threatens to solve all the rest of the galaxy's problems by turning our planet into a heap of radioactive rubble. But the point is that, as someone in your magazine pointed out, we read science fiction for fun; for me at least, militarism isn't fun. It's a turnoff. I can tolerate the occasional story, but if it becomes one of the major elements of the magazine, the probable outcome is that I will leave *Amazing Stories* on the newsstand shelves. Sorry about that.

Anyway, good luck with the 'zine. I've enjoyed it tremendously over the past few years, and I hope to go on doing so under the new editor.

Live long and prosper,  
Name Withheld  
Lawrence MI

*Your point about the BEMs is well taken. Movies such as Aliens rankle, primarily because the aliens are reduced to clay pigeons on a target field, thus lessening the the impact of human courage.*

*But such films are the Hollywood extremes, and there is militaristic fiction which ought to be read because it offers sound portrayals of courage, camaraderie, and concern for the ethics of military service. Starship Troopers, The Forever War, and Ender's Game come readily to mind as exemplary militaristic fiction. And so, we do not feel comfortable overlooking the importance of militaristic fiction in the SF genre.*

*Excluding its presence in Amazing Stories because what it presents might not be pleasant is absurd, for literature should both entertain and instruct. If*

*piece of fiction — no matter from which SF subgenre — fails to perform these tasks, it won't be printed.*

— Patrick Lucien Price

Dear Mr. Price:

I have just finished reading Robert Silverberg's column in the November 1986 edition of *Amazing Stories*, and I feel that a few comments are necessary. I will address them directly to Mr. Silverberg.

Mr. Silverberg, it is obvious that you are upset about no longer being the focus of attention at Worldcon and at other science-fiction and fantasy conventions. Time was when the only quality SF available to the fans was in books and pulp magazines. Now that film and television are making inroads, things are beginning to change, and you don't like it. Well, as we say on Earth, *C'est la vie!* Your comments about costuming and costumers, however, were shameful, and require a rebuttal.

There is a world of difference between a kid in a cape and a serious costumer, and your comments made no distinction between the two. I am not a costumer, but I have several close friends and many acquaintances who are. These people range in age from the early twenties to the early seventies, and most of them fit comfortably within the averages disclosed in the surveys conducted by Brown and Battista. Many have professional degrees, earn decent salaries (they have to — competitive costuming is not for the poor!), and read SF and fantasy regularly. They wear costumes throughout the convention, not just during the masquerade competition, and their beautiful and well-made creations add a special flavour to the activities that cannot be found anywhere else. There are many ties be-

tween costuming and literature. Of the seventeen major (non-media) awards given in the masquerade competition at the last Worldcon that I attended (LA, 1984), seven of them (41%) were based on themes from literature, from Edgar Rice Burroughs to Shakespeare. Indeed, one of the master awards was given to a costume group whose presentation was scripted by Larry Niven and whose participants included Larry Niven and Steve Barnes.

One more point: when you say that the "kids in costume" are not the readership, you are deluding yourself. The *Locus* survey showed the median (not average) age is 33. By definition, this means that one half of the respondents are age 33 or younger, including, no doubt, many of those kids in costumes. Let's face it, Mr. Silverberg, fantasy and science fiction have become diversified to the point that authors are no longer the sole gods of the genre. If this upsets you, you are welcome to withdraw to your own conventions where costumes are forbidden and fans must pass a literacy test before being allowed to attend. For myself, I shall continue to go to conventions where all aspects of SF and fantasy are represented, and avoid those where literary snobbery prevails.

Sincerely,

Steve Gill

102 Ashgrove, Apt. 12

Pointe Claire, Quebec

Canada H9R 3N4

*Readers, please continue to send us your letters. As did the reader above, feel free to respond to any issue — be it about writing, the SF and fantasy community, or the general state of affairs in the world at large. We do value your opinions, though we may not always agree.*

*Till next issue.*

— Patrick Lucien Price

# DAT-TAY-VAO

by **PAUL WILSON**

Art: **Stephen E. Fabian**







*Depending on how you want to look at it, the following story is either a sequel or a prequel to The Touch (Putnam, 1986).*

*Dr. Wilson is a full-time family practitioner and Director of Family Practice at his local hospital. Somehow he finds the free time to write both "hard" science-fiction (Healer, Wheels Within Wheels) and supernatural horror fiction. His novel, The Keep, has been filmed. His short fiction has appeared widely, in Analog, Twilight Zone, and numerous other places.*

Patsy cupped his hands gently over his belly to keep his intestines where they belonged. Weak, wet, and helpless, he lay on his back in the alley looking up at the stars in the crystal sky, unable to move, afraid to call out. The one time he had yelled loud enough to be heard on the street, loops of bowel had squirmed against his hands, feeling like a pile of Mom's slippery-slick homemade sausage all gray from boiling and coated with her tomato sauce. Visions of his insides surging from the slit in his abdomen like spring snakes from a novelty can of nuts had kept him from yelling again.

No one had come.

He knew he was dying. Good as dead, in fact. He could feel the blood oozing out of the vertical gash in his belly, seeping around his fingers and trailing down his forearms to the ground. Wet from neck to knees. Probably lying in a pool of blood . . . his very own homemade marinara sauce.

Help was maybe fifty feet away and he couldn't call for it. Even if he could stand the sight of his guts jumping out of him, he no longer had the strength to yell. Yet help was there . . . the night sounds of Quang Ngai street life . . . so near. . . .

*Nothing ever goes right for me. Nothing. Ever.*

It had been such a *sweet* deal. Six keys of Cambodian brown. He could've got that home to Flatbush no sweat and then he'd have been set up real good. Uncle Tony would've known what to do with the stuff and Patsy would've been made. And he'd never be called Fatman again. Only the grunts over here called him Fatman. He'd be Pasquale to the old boys, and Pat to the younger guys.

And Uncle Tony would've called him Kid, like he always did.

Yeah. *Would have.* If Uncle Tony could see him now, he'd call him Shit-For-Brains. He could hear him now:

*Six keys for ten G's? Whatsamatta witchoo? Din't I always tell you if it seems too good to be true, it usually is? Ay! Gabidose! Din't you smell no rat?*

Nope. No rat smell. Because I didn't *want* to smell a rat. Too eager for the deal. Too anxious for the quick score. Too damn stupid as usual to see how

that sleazeball Hung was playing me like a hooked fish.

No Cambodian brown.

No deal.

Just a long, sharp K-bar.

The stars above went fuzzy and swam around, then came into focus again.

The pain had been awful at first, but that was gone now. Except for the cold, it was almost like getting smashed and crashed on scotch and grass and just drifting off. Almost pleasant. Except for the cold. And the fear.

Footsteps . . . coming from the left. He managed to turn his head a few degrees. A lone figure approached, silhouetted against the light from the street. A slow, unsteady, almost staggering walk. Whoever it was didn't seem to be in any hurry.

Hung? Come to finish him off?

But no. This guy was too skinny to be Hung.

The figure came up and squatted flat-footed on his haunches next to him. In the dim glow of starlight and streetlight, Patsy saw a wrinkled face and a silvery goatee. The gook babbled something in Vietnamese.

God, it was Ho-Chi-Minh himself come to rob him. *Too late! The money's gone. All gone!*

No. Wasn't Ho. Couldn't be. Uncle Ho had died last month. This was just an old papa-san in the usual black pajamas. They all looked the same, especially the old ones. The only thing different about this one was the big scar across the right eye. Looked as if the lids had been fused closed over the socket.

The old man reached down to where Patsy guarded his intestines, and pushed his hands away. Patsy tried to scream in protest but heard only a sigh, tried to put his hands back up on his belly but they had weakened to limp rubber and wouldn't move.

The old man smiled as he sing-songed in gooktalk, and pressed his hands against the open wound in Patsy's belly. Patsy screamed then, a hoarse, breathy sound torn from him by the searing pain that shot in all directions from where the old gook's hands lay. The stars really swam around this time, fading as they moved, but they didn't go out.

By the time his vision cleared, the old gook was up and turned around and weaving back toward the street. The pain, too, was sidling away.

Patsy tried again to lift his hands up to his belly, and this time they moved. They seemed stronger. He wiggled his fingers through the wetness of his blood, feeling for the edges of the wound, afraid of finding loops of bowel waiting for him.

He missed the slit on the first pass. And missed it on the second. How could that happen? It had been at least a foot long and had gaped open a good three or four inches, right there to the left of his belly button. He tried again, carefully this time . . .

. . . and found a thin little ridge of flesh.

But no opening.

He raised his head — he hadn't been able to do that before — and looked down at his belly. His shirt and pants were a bloody mess, but he couldn't see any guts sticking out. And he couldn't see any wound, either. Just a dark wet mound of flesh.

If he wasn't so goddam fat, he could see down there!

He rolled onto his side — God, he *was* stronger! — and pushed himself up to his knees to where he could slump his butt onto his heels, all the time keeping at least one hand tight over his belly. But nothing came out, or even pushed against his hand. He pulled his shirt open.

The wound was closed, leaving only a thin, purplish vertical line.

Patsy felt woozy again. *What's going on here?*

He was in a coma — that had to be it. He was dreaming this.

But everything was so *real* — the rough ground beneath his knees, the congealing red wetness of the blood on his shirt, the sounds from the street, even the smell of the garbage around him. All so real . . .

Bracing himself against the wall, he inched his way up to his feet. His knees were wobbly and for a moment he thought they'd give out on him. But they held and now he was standing.

He was afraid to look down, afraid he'd see himself still on the ground. Finally, he took a quick glance. Nothing there but two clotted puddles of blood, one on each side of where he had been lying.

He tore off the rest of the ruined shirt and began walking — very carefully at first — toward the street. Any moment now he would wake up or die, and this craziness would stop. No doubt about that. But until then he was going to play out this little fantasy to the end.

By the time he made it to his bunk — after giving the barracks guards and a few wandering night owls a story about an attempted robbery and a fight — Patsy had begun to believe that he was really awake and walking around.

It was so easy to say it had all been a dream, or maybe hallucinations brought on by acid slipped into his coffee by some wise-ass during the day. He managed to fully convince himself of that scenario a good half-dozen times. And then he would look down at the scar on his belly, and at the blood on his pants.

Patsy sat on his bed in a daze.

*It really happened! He just touched me and closed me up!*

A hushed voice in the dark snapped him out of it.

"Hey! Fatman! Got any weed?"

It sounded like Donner from two bunks over, a steady customer.

"Not tonight, Hank," he said.

"What? Fatman's never out of stock!"

"He is tonight."

"You shittin' me?"

"Good night, Hank."

Actually, he had a bunch of bags stashed in his mattress, but Patsy didn't feel like dealing tonight. His mind was too numb to make change. He couldn't even mourn the loss of all his cash — every red cent he had saved up from almost a year's worth of chickenshit deals with guys like Donner. All he could think about, all he could see was that one-eyed gook leaning over him, smiling, babbling, and touching him.

He'd talk to Tram tomorrow. Tram knew everything that went on in this goddam country. Maybe he had heard something about the old gook. Maybe he could be persuaded to look for him.

One way or another, Patsy was going to find that old gook.

He had plans for him. *Big* plans.

Somehow he managed to make it through breakfast without perking the powdered eggs and scrambling the coffee.

It hadn't been easy. He had been late getting to the mess hall kitchen. He had gotten up on time, but had stood in the shower staring at that purple line up and down his belly for he didn't know how long, remembering the cut of Hung's knife, the feel of his intestines in his hands.

*Did it really happen?*

He knew it had. Accepting it and living with it was going to be the problem.

Finally he had pulled on his fatigues and hustled over to the kitchen. Rising long before sun-up was the only bad thing about being an Army cook. The guys up front might call him a pogue, but it sure beat the hell out of being a stupid grunt in the field. *Anything* was better than getting shot at. Only *gavones* got sent into the field. Smart guys got mess assignments in nice safe towns like Quang Ngai.

At least smart guys with an Uncle Tony did.

Patsy smiled as he scraped hardened scrambled egg off the griddle. He had always liked to cook. Good thing, too. Because in a way, the cooking he had done for Christmas dinner last year had kept him out of the fight this year.

As always, Uncle Tony had come for Christmas dinner. At the table Pop edged around to the big question: What to do about Patsy and the draft. To everyone's surprise, he had passed his induction physical . . .

. . . another example of how nothing ever went right for him. Patsy had learned that a weight of 225 pounds would keep a guy his height out on medical deferment. He hadn't had far to go, so he gorged on everything in sight for weeks. It would have been fun if he hadn't been so desperate. But he had made the weight: On the morning of his induction physical the bathroom scale read 229.

But the scale they used down at the Federal Building read 224.

He was in and was set to go to boot camp after the first of the year.

Pop finally came to the point: Could Uncle Tony maybe . . . ?

Patsy could still hear the disdain in Uncle Tony's voice as he spoke around a mouthful of bread.

"You some kinda peace-nik or somethin'?"

No, no, Pop had said, and went on to explain how he was afraid that Patsy, being so fat and so clumsy and all, would get killed in boot camp or step on a mine his first day in the field. You know how he is.

Uncle Tony knew. Everybody knew Patsy's fugazi reputation. Uncle Tony had said nothing as he poured the thick red gravy over his lasagna, gravy Patsy had spent all morning cooking. He took a bite and pointed his fork at Patsy.

"Y'gotta do your duty, kid. I fought in the big one. You gotta fight in this here little one." He swallowed. "Say, you made this gravy, dincha? It's good. It's real good. And it gives me an idea of how we can keep you alive so you can go on making this stuff every Christmas."

So Uncle Tony pulled some strings and Patsy wound up an Army cook. He finished with the clean-up and headed downtown to the central market area, looking for Tram. He smelled the market before he got to it — the odors of live hens, *thit heo*, and roasting dog meat mingled in the air.

He found Tram in his usual spot by his cousin's vegetable stand, wearing his old ARVN fatigue jacket; and as usual he had removed his right foot at the ankle and was polishing its shoe.

"Nice shine, yes, Fatman?" he said as he looked up and saw Patsy.

"Beautiful." He knew Tram liked to shock passers-by with his plastic leg and foot. Patsy should have been used to the gag by now, but every time he saw the foot, he thought of having his leg blown off. . . . "I want to find someone."

"American or gook?" He crossed his right lower leg over his left and snapped his shoed foot back into place at the ankle.

Patsy couldn't help feeling uncomfortable about a guy who called his own kind "gooks."

"Gook."

"What name?"

"Uh, that's the problem. I don't know."

Tram squinted up at him.

"How I supposed to find somebody without a name?"

"Old papa-san. Look like Uncle Ho."

Tram laughed. "All you guys think old gooks look like Ho!"

"And he has a scar across his eye" — Patsy put his index finger over his right eye — "that seals it closed like this."

**T**ram froze for a heartbeat, then snapped his eyes back down to his prosthetic foot. He composed his expression while he calmed his whirling mind.

*Trinh . . . Trinh was in town last night! And Fatman saw him!*

He tried to change the subject. Keeping his eyes down, he said:

"I am glad to see you still walking around this morning. Did Hung not show up last night? I warned you — he number 10 bad gook."

After waiting and hearing no reply, Tram looked up and saw that Fatman's eyes had changed. They looked glazed.

"Yes," Fatman finally said, shaking himself. "You warned me." He cleared his throat. "But about the guy I asked you about —"

"Why you want to find this old gook?"

"I want to help him."

"How?"

"I want to do something for him."

"You want to do something for old gook?"

Fatman's gaze wandered away as he spoke. "You might say I owe him a favor."

Tram's first thought was that Fatman was lying. He doubted the young American knew the meaning of returning a favor.

"Can you find him for me?" Fatman said.

Tram thought about that. And as he did, he saw Hung saunter out of a side street into the central market. He watched Hung's jaw drop when he spotted Fatman, watched his amber skin pale to the color of boiled bean curd as he spun and hurriedly stumbled away.

Tram knew in that instant that Hung had betrayed Fatman in a most vicious manner last night, and that Trinh had happened by and saved Fatman with the *Dat-tay-vao*.

It was all clear now.

On impulse, Tram said, "He lives in my cousin's village. I can take you to him."

"Great!" Fatman said, grinning and clapping him on the shoulder. "I'll get us a jeep!"

"No jeep," Tram said. "We walk."

"Walk?" Fatman's face lost much of its enthusiasm. "Is it far?"

"Not far. Just a few clicks on the way to Mo Duc. A fishing village. We leave now."

"Now? But —"

"Could be he not there if we wait." Which wasn't exactly true, but he didn't want to give Fatman too much time to think.

Tram watched reluctance and eagerness battle their way back and forth across the American's face. Finally:

"All right. Let's go. Long as it's not too far."

"If not too far for man with one foot, not too far for man with two."

As Tram led Fatman south toward the tiny fishing village where Trinh had been living for the past year, he wondered why he had agreed to bring the two of them together. His instincts were against it, yet he had agreed to

lead the American to Trinh.

Why?

*Why?* was a word too often on his mind, it seemed. Especially where Americans were concerned. Why did they send so many of their young men over here? Most of them were either too frightened or too disinterested to make good soldiers. And the few who were eager for the fight hadn't the experience to make them truly valuable. They did not last long.

He wanted to shout across the sea: *Send us seasoned soldiers, not your children!*

But who would listen?

And did age really matter? After all, hadn't he been even younger than these American boys in the fight against the French at Dien Bien Phu fifteen years ago? But he and his fellow Vietminh had had a special advantage on their side. They had all burned with a fiery zeal to drive the French from their land.

Tram had been a communist then. He smiled at the thought as he limped along on the artificial foot that served in place of the real one he had lost to a Cong booby trap last year. Communist . . . he had been young at Dien Bien Phu, and the constant talk from his fellow Vietminh about the glories of class war and revolution had drawn his mind into their ideological camp. But after the fighting was over, after the partition, what he saw of the birth pangs of the glorious new social order almost made him long for French rule again.

He had come south then, and had remained here ever since. He had willingly fought for the South until the finger-charge booby trap had caught him at the knee; after that, he found that his verve for any sort of fight had departed with his leg.

He glanced at Fatman who sweated so profusely as he walked beside him along the twisting jungle trail. He had come to like the boy, and he could not say why. Fatman was greedy, cowardly, and selfish, and he cared for no one other than himself. Yet Tram had found himself responding to the boy's vulnerability. Something tragic behind the boy's bluff and bravado. With Tram's aid, Fatman had gone from the butt of many of the jokes around the American barracks to their favored supplier of marijuana. Tram could not deny that he had profited well by helping him gain that position. He had needed the money to supplement his meager pension from the ARVN, but that had not been his only motivation. He had felt a need to help the boy.

And he *was* a boy, no mistake about that. Young enough to be Tram's son. But Tram knew he could never raise such a son as this.

So many of the Americans he had met here were like Fatman. No values, no traditions, no heritage. Empty. Hollow creatures who had grown up with nothing expected of them. And now, despite all the money and all the speeches, they knew in their hearts that they were not expected to win this war.



What sort of parents provided nothing for their children to believe in, and then sent them halfway around the world to fight for a country they had never heard of?

And that last was certainly a humbling experience — to learn that until a few years ago most of these boys had been blithely unaware of the existence of the land that had been the center of Tram's life since he had been a teenager.

"How much farther now?" Fatman said.

Tram could tell from the American's expression that he was uneasy being so far from town. Perhaps now was the time to ask.

"Where did Hung stab you?" he said.

Fatman staggered as if Tram had struck him a blow. He stopped and gaped at Tram with a gray face.

"How . . . ?"

"There is little that goes on in Quang Ngai that I don't know," he said, unable to resist an opportunity to enhance his stature. "Now, show me where."

Tram withheld a gasp as Fatman pulled up his sweat-soaked shirt to reveal the purple seam running up and down to the left of his navel. Hung had gut-cut him, not only to cause an agonizing death, but to show his contempt.

"I warned you . . ."

Fatman pulled down his shirt. "I know, I know. But after Hung left me in the alley, this old guy came along and touched me and sealed it up like magic. Can he do that all the time?"

"Not all the time. He has lived in the village for one year. He can do it some of the time every day. He will do it many more years."

Fatman's voice was a breathy whisper. "Years! But how? Is it some drug he takes? He looked like he was drunk."

"Oh no. *Dat-tay-vao* not work if you drunk."

"What won't work?"

"*Dat-tay-vao* . . . Trinh has the touch that heals."

"Heals what? Just knife wounds and stuff?"

"Anything."

Fatman's eyes bulged. "You've got to get me to him!" He glanced quickly at Tram. "So I can thank him . . . reward him."

"He requires no reward."

"I've got to find him. How far to go?"

"Not much." He could smell the sea now. "We turn here."

As he guided Fatman left into thicker brush that clawed at their faces and snagged their clothes, he wondered again if he had done the right thing by bringing him here. But it was too late to turn back now.

Besides, Fatman had been touched by the *Dat-tay-vao*. Surely that worked some healing changes on the spirit as well as the body. Perhaps the young American truly wanted to pay his respects to Trinh.

*He* will do it many more years!

The words echoed in Patsy's ears and once again he began counting the millions he'd make off the old gook. God, it was going to be so great! And so *easy*! Uncle Tony's contacts would help get the guy into the states where Patsy would set him up in a "clinic." Then he would begin to cure the incurable.

And oh God, the prices he'd charge.

How much to cure someone of cancer? Who could say what price was too high? He could ask anything — *anything*!

But Patsy wasn't going to be greedy. He'd be fair. He wouldn't strip the patients bare. He'd just ask for half — half of everything they owned.

He almost laughed out loud. This was going to be *so* sweet! All he had to do was —

Just ahead of him, Tram shouted something in Vietnamese. Patsy didn't recognize the word, but he knew a curse when he heard one. Tram started running ahead. They had broken free of the suffocating jungle atop a small sandy rise. Out ahead, the sun rippled off a calm sea. A breeze off the water brought blessed relief from the heat. Below lay a miserable ville — a jumble of huts made of odd bits of wood, sheet metal, palm fronds, and mud.

One of the huts was burning. Frantic villagers were hurling sand and water at it.

Patsy followed Tram's headlong downhill run at a cautious walk. He didn't like this. He was far from town and doubted very much he could find his way back; he was surrounded by gooks and something bad was going down.

He didn't like this at all.

As he approached, the burning hut collapsed in a shower of sparks. To the side, a cluster of black pajama-clad women stood around a supine figure. Tram had pushed his way to the center of the babbling group and now knelt beside the figure. Patsy followed him in.

"Aw, shit!" He recognized the guy on the ground. It wasn't easy. He had been burned bad and somebody had busted caps all over him, but his face was fairly undamaged and the scarred eye left no doubt that it was the same old gook who had healed him up last night. Both his eyes were closed and he looked dead, but his chest still moved with shallow respirations. Patsy's stomach lurched at the sight of all the blood and charred flesh. What was keeping him alive?

Suddenly weak and dizzy, Patsy dropped to his knees beside Tram. His millions . . . all those sweet dreams of millions and millions of easy dollars were fading away.

*Nothing ever goes right for me.*

"I share your grief," Tram said, looking at him with sorrowful dark eyes.

"Yeah. What happened?"

Tram glanced around at the frightened, grieving villagers. "They say the Cong bring one of their sick officers here and demand that Trinh heal him. Trinh couldn't. He try to explain that the time not right yet, but they grow angry and tie him up and shoot him and set his hut on fire."

"Can't he heal himself?"

Tram shook his head slowly, sadly. "No. *Dat-tay-vao* does not help the one who has it. Only others."

Patsy wanted to cry. All his plans . . . It wasn't fair!

"Those shitbums!"

"Worse than shitbums," Tram said. "These Charlie say they come back soon and destroy whole village."

Patsy's anger and self-pity vanished in a cold blast of fear. He peered at the trees and bushes, feeling naked with a thousand eyes watching him. *They're coming back!* His knees suddenly felt stronger.

"Let's get back to town!" He began to rise to his feet, but Tram held him back.

"Wait. He looking at you."

Sure enough, the old gook's eyes were open and staring directly into his. Slowly, with obvious effort, he raised his charred right hand toward Patsy. His voice rasped something.

Tram translated: "He say, 'You the one.'"

"What's that mean?" Patsy didn't have time for this dramatic bullshit. He wanted out of here. But he also wanted to stay tight with Tram because Tram was the only one who could lead him back to Quang Ngai.

"I don't know. Maybe he mean that you the one he fix last night."

Patsy was aware of Tram and the villagers watching him, as if they expected something of him. Then he realized what it was: He was supposed to be grateful, show respect for the old gook. Fine. If it was what Tram wanted him to do, he would do it. Anything to get them on their way out of here. He took a deep breath and gripped the hand, wincing at the feel of the fire-crisped skin —

— electricity shot up his arm.

His whole body spasmed with the searing bolt. He felt himself flopping around like a fish on a hook, and then he was falling. The air went out of him in a rush as his back slammed against the ground. It was a moment before he could open his eyes, and when he did, he saw Tram and the villagers staring down at him with gaping mouths and wide astonished eyes. He glanced at the old gook.

"What the hell did he do to me?"

The old gook was staring back, but it was a glassy, unfocused, sightless stare. He was dead.

The villagers must have noticed this too because some of the women began to weep.

Patsy staggered to his feet.

"What happened?"

"Don't know," Tram said with a puzzled shake of his head. "Why you fall? He not strong enough to push you down."

Patsy opened his mouth to explain, then closed it. There was nothing he could say that would make sense. He shrugged.

"Let's go," he said.

He felt like hell and just wanted to be gone. It wasn't only the threat of Charlie returning; he was tired and discouraged and so bitterly disappointed he could have sat down on the ground right then and there and cried like a wimp.

"Okay. But first I help bury Trinh. You help, too."

"What? You kidding me? Forget it!"

Tram said nothing, but the look he gave Patsy said it all: It called him fat, lazy, and ungrateful.

*Screw you!* Patsy thought. Who cared what Tram or anybody else in this stinking sewer of a country thought! It held nothing for him anymore. All his money was gone, and his one chance for the brass ring lay dead and fried on the ground before him.

As he helped dig a grave for Trinh, Tram glanced over at Fatman where he sat in the elephant grass staring morosely out to sea. Tram could sense that he was not grief-stricken over Trinh's fate. He was unhappy for himself.

So . . . he had been right about Fatman from the first: The American had come here with something in mind other than paying his respects to Trinh. Tram didn't know what it was, but he was sure Fatman had not had the best interests of Trinh or the village at heart.

He sighed. He was sick of foreigners. When would the wars end? Wars could be measured in languages here. He knew numerous Vietnamese dialects, Pidgin, French, and now English. If the North won, would he then have to learn Russian? Perhaps he would have been better off if the booby trap had taken his life instead of just his leg. Then, like Trinh, the endless wars would be over for him.

He looked down into the empty hole where Trinh's body soon would lie. Were they burying the *Dat-tay-vao* with him? Or would it rise and find its way to another? So strange and mysterious, the *Dat-tay-vao* . . . so many conflicting tales. Some said it came here with the Buddha himself, some said it had always been here. Some said it was as capricious as the wind in the choice of its instruments, while others said it followed a definite plan.

Who was to say truly? The *Dat-tay-vao* was a rule unto itself, full of mysteries that were not meant to be plumbed.

As he turned back to his digging, Tram's attention was caught by a dark blot in the water's glare. He squinted to make it out, then heard the chatter of one machine gun, then others, saw villagers begin to run and fall, felt sand kick up around him.

A Cong gunboat!

He ran for the tree where Fatman half-sat, half-crouched with a slack, terrified expression on his face. He was almost there when something hit him in the chest and right shoulder with the force of a sledgehammer, and then he was flying through the air, spinning, screaming with pain.

He landed with his face in the sand and rolled. He couldn't breathe! Panic swept over him. Every time he tried to take a breath, he heard a sucking sound from the wound in his chest wall, but no air reached his lungs. He chest felt ready to explode. Black clouds encroached on his dimming vision.

Suddenly Fatman was leaning over him, shouting through the typhoon roaring in his ears.

*"Tram! Tram! Jesus God get up! You gotta get me outta here! Stop bleeding f'Christsake and get me out of here!"*

Tram's vision clouded to total darkness and the roaring grew until it drowned out the voice.

**P**atsy dug his fingers into his scalp.

How was he going to get back to town? Tram was dying, turning blue right here in front of him, and he didn't know enough Vietnamese to use with anyone else and didn't know the way back to Quang Ngai and the area was lousy with Charlie.

*What am I going to do?*

As suddenly as they started, the AKs stopped. The cries of the wounded and the terrified filled the air in its place.

Now was the time to get out!

Patsy looked at Tram's mottled, dusky face. If he could stopper that sucking chest wound, maybe Tram could hang on, and maybe tell him the way back to town. He slapped the heel of his hand over it and pressed.

Tram's body arched in seeming agony. Patsy felt something, too — electric ecstasy shot up his arm and spread through his body like subliminal fire. He fell back, confused, weak, dizzy.

*What the hell —?*

He heard raspy breathing and looked up. Air was gushing in and out of Tram's wide open mouth in hungry gasps; his eyes opened and his color began to lighten.

Tram's chest wasn't sucking anymore. As Patsy leaned forward to check the wound, he felt something in his hand and looked. A bloody lead slug sat in his palm. He looked at the chest where he had laid that hand, and what he saw made the walls of his stomach ripple and compress, as if looking for something to throw up.

Tram's wound wasn't *there* anymore! Only a purplish blotch remained.

Tram raised his head and looked down at where the bullet had torn into him.

*"The Dat-tay-vao! You have it now! Trinh passed it on to you! You have*

the *Dat-tay-vao!*"

*I do?* he thought, staring at the bullet rolling in his palm. *Holy shit, I do!*

He wouldn't have to get some gook back to the States to make his mint — all he had to do was get himself home in one piece.

Which made it all the more important to get the hell out of this village now.

"Let's go!"

"Fatman, you can't go. Not now. You must help. They —"

Patsy threw himself flat as something exploded in the jungle a hundred yards behind them, hurling a brown and green geyser of dirt and underbrush high into the air.

*Mortar!*

Another explosion followed close on the heels of the first, but this one was down by the waterline south of the village.

Tram was pointing out to sea.

"Look! They firing from boat." He laughed. "Can't aim mortar from boat!"

Patsy stayed hunkered down with his arms wrapped tight around his head, quaking with terror as the ground jittered with each of the next three explosions. Then they stopped.

"See?" Tram said, sitting boldly in the clearing and looking out to sea. "Even *they* know it foolish! They leaving. They only use for terror. Cong very good at terror."

*No argument there*, Patsy thought as he climbed once more to his feet.

"Get me out of here *now*, Tram! You owe me!"

Tram's eyes caught Patsy's and pinned him to the spot like an insect on a board. "Look at them, Fatman."

Patsy tore his gaze away and looked at the ville. He saw the villagers — the maimed and bleeding ones and their friends and families — looking back at him. Waiting. They said nothing, but their eyes . . .

He ripped his gaze loose. "Those Cong'li be back!"

"They need you, Fatman," Tram said. "You're the only one who can help them now."

Patsy looked again, unwillingly. Their eyes . . . calling him. He could almost feel their hurt, their need.

"No way!"

He turned and began walking toward the brush. He'd find his own way back if Tram wouldn't lead him. Better than waiting around here to get caught and tortured by Charlie. It might take him all day, but —

"Fatman!" Tram shouted. "*For once in your life!*"

That stung. Patsy turned and looked at the villagers once more, feeling their need like a taut rope around his chest, pulling him toward them. He ground his teeth. It was idiotic to stay, but . . .

*Once more. Just one, to see if I still have it.* He could spare a couple of

minutes for that, then be on his way. At least that way he'd be sure what had happened with Tram wasn't some sort of crazy freak accident. *Just one.*

As he stepped toward the villagers, he heard their voices begin to murmur excitedly. He didn't know what they were saying but felt their grateful welcome like a warm current through the draw of their need.

He stopped at the nearest wounded villager, a woman holding a bloody, unconscious child in her arms. His stomach lurched as he saw the wound — a slug had nearly torn the kid's arm off at the shoulder. Blood oozed steadily between the fingers of the hand the woman kept clenched over the wound. Swallowing the revulsion that welled up in him, he slipped his hands under the mother's to touch the wound —

— and his knees almost buckled with the ecstasy that shot through him.

The child whimpered and opened his eyes. The mother removed her hand from the wound. There was no wound. Gone, just like Tram's. She cried out in joy and fell to her knees beside Patsy, clutching his leg as she wept.

Patsy swayed. He had it! No doubt about it — he had the goddam *Dat-tay-vao!* And it felt so *good!* Not just the pleasure it gave, but how that little gook kid was looking up at him now with his bottomless black eyes and flashing him a shy smile. He felt high, like he'd been smoking some of his best merchandise.

*One more. Just one more.*

He disengaged his leg from the mother and moved over to where an old woman writhed in agony on the ground, clutching her abdomen. *Belly wound . . . I know the feeling, mama-san.* He knelt and wormed his hand under hers. That burst of pleasure surged again as she stiffened and two slugs popped into his hand. Her breathing eased and she looked up at him with gratitude beaming from her eyes.

*Another!*

On it went. Patsy could have stopped at any time, but found he didn't want to. There didn't seem to be any doubt in the villagers' minds that he would stay and heal them all. They knew he could do it and *expected* him to do it. It was so new, such a unique feeling, he didn't want it to end. Ever. He felt a sense of belonging he had never known before. He felt protective of the villagers. But it went beyond them, beyond this little ville, seemed to take in the whole world.

Finally, it was over. Patsy stood in the clearing before the huts, looking for another wounded body. He checked his watch — only thirty minutes or so at it and there were no more villagers left to heal. They all clustered around him at a respectful distance, silently watching him. He gave himself up to the euphoria enveloping him, blending with the sound of the waves, the wind in the trees, the cries of the gulls. He hadn't realized what a beautiful place this was. If only —

A new sound intruded — the drone of a boat engine. Patsy looked out at

the water and saw the Cong gunboat returning. Fear knifed through the pleasurable haze as the villagers scattered for the trees. Were the Cong going to land?

No. Patsy saw a couple of the crew crouched on the deck, heard the familiar **choonk!** of a mortar shell shooting out of its tube. An explosion quickly followed somewhere back in the jungle. Tram had been right. No way they could get any accuracy with a mortar on the rocking deck of a gunboat. Just terror tactics.

*Damn those bastards! Why'd they have to come back and wreck his mood?* Just when he'd been feeling good for the first time since leaving home. Matter of fact, he'd been feeling better than he could ever remember, home or anywhere else. For once, everything seemed *right*.

For once, something was going Patsy's way, and the Cong had to ruin it.

Two more wild mortar shots, then he heard gunfire start from the south and saw three new gunboats roaring up toward the first. But these were flying the old red-white-and-blue. Patsy laughed and raised his fist.

"Get 'em!"

The Cong let one more shell go **choonk!** before pouring on the gas and slewing away.

Then he heard a whine from above and the world exploded under him.

**A** voice from far away . . . Tram's . . .

*"... chopper coming, Fatman . . . get you away soon . . . hear it? . . . almost here . . ."*

Patsy opened his eyes and saw the sky, then saw Tram's face poke into view. He looked sick.

"Fatman! You hear me?"

"How bad?" Patsy asked.

"You be okay."

Patsy turned his head and saw a ring of weeping villagers who were looking everywhere and anywhere but at him. He realized he couldn't feel anything below his neck. He tried to lift his head for a look at himself but didn't have the strength.

"I wanna see."

"You rest," Tram said.

"Get my head up, dammit!"

With obvious reluctance, Tram gently lifted his head. As Patsy looked down at what was left of him, he heard a high, keening wail. His vision swam, mercifully blotting out the sight of the bloody ruin that had once been the lower half of his body. He realized that the wail was his own voice.

Tram lowered his head and the wail stopped.

*I shouldn't even be alive!*

Then he knew. He was waiting for someone. Not just anyone would do. A certain someone.



A hazy peace came. He drifted into it and stayed there until the chopping thrum of a slick brought him out; then he heard an American voice.

"I thought you said he was alive!"

Tram's voice. "He is."

Patsy opened his eyes and saw the shocked face of an American soldier.

"Who are you?" Patsy asked.

"Walt Erskine. Medic. I'm gonna —"

"You're the one," Patsy said. Somehow, he bent his arm at the elbow and lifted his hand. "Shake."

The medic looked confused. "Yeah. Okay. Sure." He grabbed Patsy's hand, and Patsy felt the searing electric charge. Erskine jerked back, clutching his hand. "What the hell?"

The peace closed in on Patsy again. He had held on as long as he could. Now he could embrace it. One final thought arced through his mind like a lone meteor in a starless sky.

The *Dat-tay-vao* was going to America after all.



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# THE CASTAWAY

by Phillip C. Jennings  
art: Roger Raupp

*After having supported his wife, Debbie, through medical school and residency, Phillip C. Jennings is now training for a career as a science-fiction writer. Debbie, of course, is providing him with room and board.*

*Phillip's career is moving forward: not only has he sold a story to us, but he has also sold a story to The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction and one to John Carr for his anthology Silicon Brains.*

*As for this tale, the author informs us: "[this] is the fruit of my love of seventeenth-century English and its force of expressions: fiery with ambition, violence, and high deeds."*

January 8, 1645

Dozens of men witnessed against him. Charges were modified, his veracity questioned, his identity challenged. A day of this torture was an eternity, and two eternities could break a man's heart.

Sleet beat against high windows. Below them Puritan commissioners sat in grizzled ranks. From piety one retained his hat. Advantage Seaton always addressed his fellows as "saints," in the new style. He was twice dangerous, a firebrand with crazy ideas, but not stupid. Bishop Melnes wondered how much the outspoken ranter dominated the other judges.

Saint Seaton's voice reverberated through the timbered hall. "Lords, what deviltry hath gotten in this man, to die in another's place? We hear his own choirmaster disown him! We — let's not forget! With our own ears we hear him speak his defense in a cant never used in England, his words and letters all askew. Did he not just now utter the word 'mob,' and then explain he meant an unruly crowd? No bishop spoke such —"

"My tongue was barbarized in the hospital, working —"

"BE STILL! Ye shall have time to speak, here and on the gallows."

The President of the Court pounded his gavel. "His uses aside, the man obliged us to send for witnesses from afar, and to delay proceedings pending they came. If he be a substitute, he is yet culpable. By which court then shall he be attained?"

Saint Seaton's jaw dropped. "Your Lordship!" he shouted. "This impos-



tor knows whither his original is fled. Would ye have him fox us by pleading 'yeoman' here and 'gentleman' there? God's wounds! He can read, can't he? Let us be after him, and he shall spew truths ere day is done."

A gust from the storm outside rattled the panes, and a hundred tapers flickered, plunging the hall into momentary gloom. "I beg to speak," Melnes cried from the floor. "If I'm a false bishop, where's the true one? In France? Rome? The Palatinate? As for the testimony of mine own people, 'tis true I've changed in four years. They need not be witting perjurers to bear false witness!"

His words echoed without impact. Oh, the impotence! From such experiences was born a passion to speak truth, to bring doubt to these stern, complaisant faces. Now Seaton was talking again, harping on his ignorance of men and events. Melnes mopped his brow. Something had gone dreadfully wrong. He'd been assured that he'd never come to trial, that he'd be amnestied this very year. History had taken a wrong turn, or more than one historian had been lax in his research.

Now, because his linguistic competence was less than perfect, his interrogators began down a strange and perilous path. How to stop these inquiries? Confess? He'd already admitted his liturgical errors, his *Arminian* tendencies. He'd surrendered his office, yet the hounds kept nipping at his heels!

They insisted on the truth. They might kill him for it, but he was likely to die anyhow. Was death worse than the doom his unforeseen trial imposed on him, preventing him from making his Christmas rendezvous and escaping this God-ridden world of sorrow?

Two weeks had passed since Christmas, two weeks of black despair! He searched the galleys. Better a quick death than nibbling torture. Death would seal his lips. Death would prevent him from yielding to the temptation to stagger his audience with his story.

He ached to tell that truth! Yet his words would never be believed. No, he'd have to come up with something else, a version translated into terms these Puritans could deal with.

Here was something to blow Seaton's mind! "I — I do fear you've found me out, gentlemen. Yet before I lay bare my nature, I'd know this. What is your remedy for cases of demon possession?"

"La, demons, is it!" Saint Seaton roared. "Demons! Are ye a demon?"

"Your Lord Jesus Christ cast such as I out of the bodies we stole, and gave the power to his disciples as had faith —"

The President of the Court pounded his gavel for minutes before the chamber grew settled. "You claim to be a demon," he mocked. "Were we the credulous churls you take us for, we'd have you exorcised, whereon you'd play bishop once again. Would you have such sport of us?"

"But I am him! At least this is the bishop's body!"

The President bent to let Seaton whisper in his ear. His reply was heard by many. "Papistic superstition! I doubt the pure laws of Saxon England

forbade 'demons' from their ancient craft."

Two commissioners dared smile. Their President leaned forward. "It had been well this were not necessary. However, there being no other course but to attend your foolishness I call Lady Francis to stand before us, and describe any marks, habits, or corruptions which might signify the man you claim to be."

Lady Francis! The mistress he never knew he had! A redheaded woman stepped forth and described the hairy nevus below the bishop's right shoulder. Melnes doffed his shirt. The spot was as she described. Those in attendance murmured, the commissioners fulminated, the President banged his hammer. "This is indeed he whom we've summoned, and no impostor!"

### November 21, 1661

On a slope tangled with toppled oaks, the master of these nine hundred acres dismounted. Approaching a row of sheds hurriedly constructed of green timber, he entered each, found all filled with the harvest of his new plantation, and let his thoughts pass from one care to the next.

Ghosts of fog hung above the tannic waters of the Pamunkey river, greying the vacillating colors of a November dawn. Ex-bishop Melnes found no serenity in the view. "Quitrents," he mumbled. "Fourpence the pound duties, and where am I to fetch two hundred pounds to pay my debts? Lord, but 'tis enough to root the peace out of a man."

Each plosive gave birth to a puff of mist. His mare snorted. "Forgive me," Melnes grinned. "You heard my chatter? What do you think? After twenty years I've got the language down."

He heard a distant splash. The moment was at hand. Yesterday the *Swan* had anchored six miles downriver. Soon he'd have his chance to exchange tobacco for the receipts which served as local currency.

Melnes secured his horse and hastened to the end of his wharf. Coming round the bend he saw three longboats, great sweeps purling the smooth waters as they rowed. The *Swan* under tow? What tobacco shipper commanded so many men?

"What vessel?" Melnes called. "What vessel? Is that the *Swan*?"

"Nay, Bishop." The words carried over the water. "But be not afeared. We're no men of blood, but worthies of God's own providence."

"Except I'm remade, I'm no bishop. There are few clergy in Virginia, and those best sought in Jamestown."

The first boat reached the dock. A grim, soldierly man in buff tunic tossed the painter to the Virginian's feet. "Bishop or master, which so ye will; make us fast, and I shall cast light upon our coming."

"You have a small army here," Melnes responded.

"Ironsiders all, nor the poxed rout we loosed on Jamaica. These men wit-

nessed God's mercies at Naseby, Long Sutton . . ." His brow grew dark. "But England delights more in servitude than freedom. Now the nation hath their new king, and a popish heir to the throne! 'Tis a piteous thing, Lord Bishop, to see a life's work fall."

"Your name, sir?"

"Penderley, Lord Bishop; and my title, Major General."

"I'm as placeless a bishop as you are a general, Lord Penderley. I was impeached before Charles the First fled London —"

"1640, was it not? I've made a study of your case. There is much in it to make a soul curious."

The ex-bishop suppressed the alarm he felt as Penderley's men thundered onto the dock, and then ashore to muster in two rows. He gestured. "If each crossed the sea at your expense, you've headrights to claim a thousand acres."

"I may do so. I shall audit your wisdom, and acquit myself thereby. Come, Lord Bishop, invite me in. You have a home here, do ye not? I've a casket of good wine to share out. Let us drink and wag our tongues."

The plantation was astir before the two men led the mare into view of the house. As the troop trailed through the stubble that passed for lawn, Melnes shouted for his cook. "We've a multitude to serve. Get Robert to help tend your fires."

He turned to Lord Penderley. "We build of wood, hence from fear of combustion we scatter rooms around the common; here a kitchen, there closets for the servants . . ."

"You've done much in fifteen years."

"Less. I was trappanned — exiled to Virginia with little money and but one man. Eleven years passed before I borrowed my way to the shores of the Pamunkey."

"You seem yet young, your hair brown and lavish."

Mr. Melnes climbed to his porch. "By God's blessing I am healthy in a land that demands strength."

"Another mystery," the general muttered. He set the casket on a small outdoor table. "Early for *vino*, but none too soon for *veritas*. Shall we speak on that trial of yours?"

The ex-bishop removed his hat and shook out his locks. "A travesty of justice. I was never the capital enemy, only Archbishop Laud. Four winters I served on parole, laboring in the hospital at Bath. Many I healed were bold to testify in my behalf, yet those who charged me —"

The general exercised his memory. "'Our late remissness only encouraged him in the continuance of evil,'" he recited. "'As when in days of might he spent lavishly the substance of the people on popish embellishments . . .'"

Melnes shivered. The recollection of those days harrowed his strength. "I humbled myself in charitable work, wherefrom I learned the peoples' godli-

ness. I repudiated Archbishop Laud, and swore to regard the court's views as to railings, crossings, kneelings, the placement of tables, and all such subtleties. Yes, I was a changed man, yet thus read my indictment."

General Penderley laughed. He perched on the porch rail. "A changed man," he repeated. "When the court summoned your old singing-master, such was his witness: you were a double craftily secreted into place, and the true bishop off to France!"

He paused. "'Twas odd you gave no sign of perception when you clapped eyes on your own countrymen. They might have been utter strangers, even your mistress —"

To change the subject Melnes turned tables on his inquisitor. "Tell me, General, are the people happy with their new king?"

Penderley clenched his fists. "God's mercies! I mind how in former times the Lord gave us to walk in the light from Naseby to the Battle of the Dunes! Assailed at every quarter, we called on His name and disordered hosts twice our number. In the peaceable business of government we were buffeted by His hand into wise courses, steering from Leveller madness, as likewise we humbled the great lords and ladies.

"We sought the refreshment of the Commonwealth and would have enfranchised the people of all stations whatsoever. We would have planted godliness throughout the whole groaning world. Such was our will, our pity —"

The ex-bishop raised an eyebrow. "You speak of years past."

"Shall I be damned?" the general asked. He bent to mumble. It was a Puritan habit to break into prayer at odd moments, but the sight made Melnes think of a lunatic in debate with his knees.

Penderley cast an upward glance and caught Melnes gawking. "I confess that we sought God's wisdom, yet our piety began to stink. The Light led us into a wearisome aridity, and the people fell away. After the Protector died, they clamored for a Saul anointed by the same Parliament for which we risked our lives! Then I looked over our footsteps to see where we'd neglected God's light. I learned we'd misunderstood His love of buffets and adversities. How should I take up His challenge? I found the answer in the annals of your trial."

Melnes coughed. Twenty years, yet he'd caught himself about to utter an anachronistic *Really?* "My trial?"

"'Demon possession,'" General Penderley marveled. "'Twas a mistake to bring that up. You had a night to waken to your blunder, to invent yet another tale to account for your strange manner of speech."

"Indeed," agreed his host. "That night Saint Seaton decided I was a devil after all, and such was the story his faction bruited about. For my part I recalled the stroke I'd suffered in 1641. As the surgeon James Moleyns testified, those invalided for such cause often lose their speech —"

"Moleyns was a Royalist."

"Yet he spoke truth."

"He lied, tobacco-man. None at Bath remember this stroke, which had lain ye months abed."

Melnes looked up. He pursed his lips. "No inquiry was made."

"They were weary by then, and glad to see you exiled. 'Twas I, long after, who went to the hospital. Your fellows were full of tales of your tenure, and how many afflicted men and women you miraculously healed."

The ex-bishop frowned. "You've troubled much —"

"You are a wonder, Bishop. God's wonder? Satan's? He Who guided us of yore: was He the simple God I worshiped all these years, or a juggler who heated our hopes only to dash them into icy water, and thus temper the iron in our souls?"

"There is much one cannot know," Melnes answered.

"Cowards do not presume," the general continued. "We're taught to be mean-spirited before God. Perhaps I damn myself to think other than most. Almighty God did wrestle with Jacob, and Jacob fought back, and God did love him for it.

"I take that as reason for His disowning those who worshiped Him with cringing piety in England. I now know He'd have us hazard all to contend with Him, to love Him with that spirited love that is brother to hate. To that end He tenders us weapons, for He is fair and would not see us disadvantaged. One choice remains to me, to use you as His gift.

"Nay, do not blanch! I have searched Scripture. By this Word I know you and I must cleave together. You have been sent to travail in God's creation. In our blindness we thrust you into exile. Thus I account for your language, your manifold ignorances, and your beneficent powers."

"I, an angel?"

"There must be many ranks and musters of your kind, and you so barely elevated over those born to sin, that some ill deed condemned you to our sphere, pending when you shall have worked a penance by helping me. That is, an you are an angel, for if I be mistaken —"

Melnes shook his head. Try as he might, his voice remained a whisper. "'Twas the kindness of the court not to make much of my absurdity. My 'confession' was an afterclap of the stroke I suffered. Even now, when taxed too heavily, I speak with disordered mind."

The general stood and removed his glove. A signal! From sundry parts of the commons his ironsiders drew near. Melnes felt sweat beading on his forehead. Why was he denied the appearance of courage? Was that so much, that his hands remain capable of easy gestures?

His guest spoke. "Nay, Bishop. You have been wary in your carriages, but lay no more weight on my patience. Here stand my men, of God's elect. You must now show yourself. We mean to see God's cause prosper."

"Are any sick? I'm well-trained —"

"We came for guidance. You shall be our prophet. Man, bishop, devil, or



reluctant Jonah — deliver us a marvel worth our voyage here.”

Melnes closed his eyes as in prayer. He opened them again, peeped at the scowling general, and sighed. “Louis the Fourteenth, King of France: he shall rule to 1715 and war repeatedly against the godly cause.” He looked away. “The Edict of Nantes will be revoked in ten or fifteen years, and the Huguenots forced to flee. . . .”

The general signaled for cups and poured them both wine. “I can’t wait fifteen years,” he grumbled.

“Five years from now London will burn in a great fire.”

The general shrugged. “The warning may advance my fortune, but little more.”

“The Turks attack the Empire in two years. Hungary shall be partitioned. In 1683 their siege of Vienna shall collapse, and Christendom will nevermore be in great danger from that quarter.”

“Hard news. The Turks are wonderful mischiefs against papistry.”

Melnes raised his cup and sipped. “I wish I might please you. Here’s something. England and Holland will fight briefly, and the New Netherlands will become English in 1667.”

“You make a poor Isaiah. How shall we mix in these matters?”

The ex-bishop sighed. “I am bound by oath not to reveal these things. Now I have done so, nor did you put the screws to me. I am not staunch, General, and the bitterness of a castaway’s life has sapped my resolve. For a long time curiosity has tempted me to try my hand at what my fellow angels call a ‘temporal paradox.’ You laid hands on me, and the dry husk of my honor vanished at once, and the irony is, my trespass doesn’t even signify to you!

“Let me speak nakedly. To ransom my debt-ridden life you’d have me tell how to plant a Protestant nation where none now is. Think of it as God’s law: history is ordained in its courses. Suppose you find friends in Boulogne, help their rising against King Louis, and feed those who would have died in famine. Suppose then your side triumphs, and gains the rule of France. From that time the world must endure a false future, and truth be undone —”

The general laughed. “A trick on God! God juggled us, His saints, shining His light, leading us into a world of such nits and complexities that we lost our way. Now we might have our revenge! But as for what you say of France, I am too English to want France. Give me another hope.”

Melnes cupped his fingers and blew to warm them. “Since 1641, I’ve restrained myself. For the sake of experiment, and because I’m tired of a debtor’s life, and for another, subtler reason, perhaps I should help you. I might make you king, and I, archbishop of a paradise not yet discovered. We shall do them well, bringing them cattle, corn, and metal, and inoculating them a century early against European colonialism.”

He raised his cup. “They have beautiful women in Hawaii.”

"Where is this place?"

"A few degrees south of the Tropic of Cancer, in the midst of the Spanish Ocean. Could we fight north to the right latitude, then sail west; that must satisfy, for Hawaii consists of several large islands."

"And how many men to conquer it?"

"At present 'tis divided into manifold small kingdoms. We might find allies. Your men and mine together are not too few if we make friends and take heed of being too sharp."

That night the ex-bishop went into the woods to dig up a small box.

"Then I followed him to his rooms," the ironsider who watched him reported. "Did we but search his chest . . ."

"Nay," responded the general. "They are his medicines, and will do miracles for us as they did in Bath. That he fetched them forth is the best of signs."

Penderley bent close, yet his gravelly whisper carried several yards. "We must be tender with Mr. Melnes. This bishop is a fluttery soul, afeared of ruin. My voice alone tells him he hath not failed in the works of his life. For that reason, though he wing hither and yon, in the end he shall cleave to our company."

Among the Virginian's servants one took it upon himself to spy. Lord Penderley's words were carried back into the big house. A short while later Robert thought twice of his master's reaction, returned to the bedroom, and found Melnes raising a strange phial to his lips.

A green face, tongue stuck out — poison? Robert dashed the phial from his master's mouth, and barely in time.

During the sea voyage, a guard was posted around the bishop's sickbed. When they debarked in Jamaica, Penderley came to scold him. "The sin against the Holy Ghost! You'd damn yourself to perdition! Hell as our world must seem to you, there is one place worse!"

He spoke in frustration. At Port Royal the bishop was ill from the drug and in no condition to pose as sage or angel. Yet the cause prospered: a dozen Huguenots and Dutchmen joined Penderley's party. The general was persuasive, and subscriptions were collected to buy a Spanish prize. A small fleet, two ships and a caravel well-stocked with citrus, sailed southward.

"Four-and-ninety men, twelve lads, and seven harlots," Lord Penderley boasted that first day out. "Empires have been won with less. Armored and horsed they shall be as gods, and the women shall dam a royal race. Bred of these whores, swart lordlings a lifetime hence shall think themselves English."

"We might have crossed the Isthmus to attack Old Panama," Melnes replied. He tottered to Penderley's side and lowered his voice. "Only had we done so, we'd gain such booty none would venture on, but sail to England to live as squires."

"Ere you make other such decisions —" the general began. His whisper signified a mood change, from ebullience to doubt. "I've heard naught but ill anent our course. We might make better time faring east."

"As you will," the ex-bishop shrugged. "What I know is feigned from books and maps, and not to be compared to the wisdom of a true pilot, but the Dutch and Portuguese guard the eastern seas better than the Spaniards protect the west."

Penderley put a hand to Melnes's shoulder. "Yours is a freshened heart. A man in contemplation of mortal sin thinks little of the long course."

"Morgan will take Panama nine years from now. I've only saved it for him."

"Ah! To preserve posterity from our mischiefs!"

"Lord Penderley, I've thought much these last days. You say you studied the records of my trial. You took them from the Inns of Court and never brought them back. Because of you, the scholars of a future age will be misled —"

Melnes choked, then continued. "In my youth I was capable of anger. One week SerCo rescheduled a customer service visit three times, forcing me to stay home, all while my projo equipment was on the blink. My COP index reached such heights that they sent out a — this means nothing to you."

"I understand how angels may be angry, for 'tis the proper spirit whereby to war with devils."

"Could I but summon the passion I wasted on that trifle, I'd so vent my tongue on you that you'd call me out. Yet would that be fair? This impious expedition is as much my fault as yours."

General Penderley turned to squint at the horizon. "You take yourself overmuch to blame. I found you weak, fenced you with my men. . . ."

Melnes shook his head so violently his broad black hat flew off; he caught it and scratched his head. At sea one was allowed such gestures. Nits and lice were everywhere.

Would Penderley be interested to learn that the human flea was extinct in the twenty-second century? But at the thought of his own kind, Bishop Melnes's wrath kindled. "My . . . angel friends have forgotten me. After fifteen years this much is plain. Fifteen years; fifteen poisoned Christmases! No, General; I break my oath to send them a signal. If they find themselves incapable of stopping me, then Hawaii it is, but the virtue of those islands is illiteracy and isolation — I do my friends a favor. I make it easy for them to intervene and repair the fabric of time."

"You would have us snapped up in God's trap?"

"So many unknowns, so many uncertainties! That's the problem with paradoxes. Can they stop us? I pray, but I do not hope. Reason tells me events cannot be undone. The new, false future will seem real. . . ." Melnes shrugged. "I grow incoherent."

During the next few weeks, the ex-bishop regained his vigor, though his cheeks lacked color and he failed to put on weight. Well into his fifties, to Robert's distress he began to look his age, a situation that persisted until Lord Penderley relented, gave him the office of ship's surgeon, and restored to him his box of medicines.

On his advice the general sold the caravel in Buenos Aires and transferred goods and men to the *Trump of Joy*. Despite their fears and the storms which blew against them, the two remaining ships pushed through on a route tested by Magellan and Drake.

After three weeks of hell, they turned and made good time northward, sped by coastal currents. The men began to sing again; sometimes hymns, sometimes melodies from England's civil war.

*The guns did so fart,  
Made poor Taffy start,  
O Taffy, O Taffy —*

*In Kineton Green,  
Poor Taffy was seen,  
O Taffy, O Taffy —*

The general left the cabin to which he'd been long confined and found Melnes in the infirmary, treating an injured sailor.

He stepped inside, bending beneath a bulkhead. "What of these lands?" he asked, gesturing toward the verdant shores of southern Chile.

A boy walked in, carrying a tray of steaming bandages. Melnes shook them out to cool, then wrapped them around the invalid's bruised torso. As he worked, he answered, "Let us rule Hawaii for, um, two generations, building ships and faring east to add Oregon to our godly empire. With good sailors and ships, we'll trade with Japan for ingots and guns. By the third generation, we'll be ready to contest the Spaniards. In 1780 Peru will revolt, and we'll fly to them as seafaring allies. Next, the Philippines —"

"On the one hand you say such things. On the other you mutter darkly of false futures."

"Perhaps history has already swerved off course. If not, it must when we reach our destination. Once one prodigy is accomplished, why not many? Having made a muddle of the world's affairs, is there any end we dare not set ourselves?"

"Yet you're an angel, and pray — that God preserve the integrity of His business? Pray we are on His business, or He might have us sunk."

"I trust the Almighty works with more delicacy. Yet I fear the whole fabric of creation lies undefended against us. We shall soon make such thumbs at the laws of cause and effect that Aristotle will shiver in his grave."

They crossed the equator and continued up the coast until they reached a Mexican harbor. Lord Penderley went ashore, summoned the villagers, and proclaimed a market to replenish the ships's stocks. Melnes was set the task of preaching God's Word. "You mean to be archbishop? Then prove yourself!"

Melnes contemplated a future in which Protestantism grew from this germ to change the face of Latin America. He shook his head. It was unlikely that his bad Spanish was capable of exciting the zeal of the solemn mestizos native to this place. Yet he'd best be careful. "If any convert to godliness, 'twill be our duty to carry them with us, or the servants of Antichrist will burn them as heretics."

"Just so. We lost six in the storms at the Straits. Tender me six converts, and I'll count you the more friend of God His Truth."

"Don't kill yourself trying to be grateful," was Melnes's unspoken answer. He spent a day devising a homily in which the Viceroy of Mexico was likened to a dragon, and calumniated for eating the live hearts of virgins — Protestant propaganda exaggerated to the limits of local credulity. Were there any limits? Until the *Trump of Joy* had dropped anchor, these people were convinced that *luteranos* sported horns and tails!

The next morning he preached. Wonder of wonders! A crowd gathered, young men fell to their knees — word had gotten out that this was the way to enlist in Lord Penderley's expedition. Even among these down-to-earth people a few sought romance and adventure!

Melnes paraded to the docks. Cattle to one side, horses on the other — for a moment he felt the Mexicans in his wake were just another kind of livestock. Certainly, that was the spirit in which Lord Penderley appraised them. "You've overdone yourself, Bishop. I asked for six, you bring me twelve. But tell the, uh, maid to be off. Fat as she is . . ."

"She can cook. I'd not turn her back to be burnt."

Penderley grimaced. "I'm bound by promise; therefore, pack her among the women, and quickly, for I'm pleased soon to raise anchor. We have passages to make and tempests to endure for God's work to be accomplished."

Weeks passed before they again caught sight of land, weeks in which the memory of solid earth grew unreal. The creak of timbers and snap of canvas, the taste of salt, and the smells of bilge and rum defined their lives. How the imaginative Spaniards endured such journeys none cared to guess, but Penderley's ironside took comfort in the Psalms, whose language kept them grounded in a world of sheep and harps, oxen and vineyards.

Then came new smells of earth and flowers. Clouds mounted ahead, lodged against tropic mountains. Shore birds flocked to the rigging over their heads. General Penderley touched Melnes's shoulder and pointed. "Hawaii?"

"We've done it," came the gloomy answer. "All time, all space, the whole creation is now new modeled, and free to crash down on our heads like a

house of cards.”

They sailed on, perfecting their charts while looking for a good harbor. “It’s big, this island,” the general commented next evening. He gazed inland at the smokes rising from hills cloaked in Mediterranean foliage. “Large and inhabited by a rude folk who turn backs to the sea. We’ve traveled ninety leagues of coast and seen nary a canoe, and only one or two huts.”

“Those tree-bears or sloths we saw through your glass? Curious. They don’t fit the Pacific ecology. I nurture a fledgling doubt,” Melnes admitted. “Am I the first time traveler to paradox my own future? There have always been legends of a western land, a floating island not mapped on any chart. There it is, General! We tried to fox your turbulent, contentious God, and He’s sent us to a place of quarantine!”

“Pah! Speak no more nonsense, but if you say ’tis no Hawaii, well and good, for I’ll dare name it. Shall it be Hesperia? Avalon? Melnes-ia?”

Melnes shook his head dolefully. “It’s been named Avalon, yes. The Chinese call it P’eng-Lai, the Irish know it as Breasil. This I swear, set foot on yon neverland and your doom is sealed. But if you have any hope of lifting this curse, restore yourselves to your God’s love by casting me off, no more to counsel you. Do this now, and sail away!”

General Penderley turned and frowned. “What did you call yourself? A time traveler?”

“A voyager from a posterity in which Hawaii was discovered by Captain Cook in 1778. They sent me back to collect every kind of diseased tissue I could find near Bath, burying my specimens for the edification of scientists of the twenty-second century. I was chosen for the job because of my expertise in ancient dialects and my willingness to risk the life of my temporary body to immerse myself in your violent age.”

Melnes laughed. “You think me a bookish man, and timid, but in my era I was considered wondrously courageous.”

“You’re no angel? You’ve no more assurance of God, no more knowledge of His ways, than I?”

“Less. Until now I only feigned — well, to agree with you that He existed and would brook our challenges. When I spoke otherwise, it was in keeping with my fears that we might puncture the tissue of N-space, creating a dimensional tube, a permanent leak in reality —”

“You’re no angel,” the General repeated.

“Nor a devil. Just a dissembling castaway, stranded in the wrong age. But now, from what I see off our bow — General Penderley, for all my rant of N-space and H-space, black holes and relativity, your ideas of creation seem sounder than mine, for only a careful deity with a sense of mischief could have brought us here!”

Melnesia was the size of Spain and France combined, and of similar out-

line: an angled figure eight. Dark amazons ruled along the rivers south of the tropic swamp known as the Abwe. The Tarf ranged savannahs to either side, driving herds of toloks to pasture and protecting them from russet lions.

The pale Hoodoo wandered freely, tinker-traders without a homeland. Baldheaded Cilni farmed in the northern forests, and among the snowcapped mountains beyond the Ubeh cities of Hidum, Bopoy, and Buem Didi dwelt the xenophobic Shan of Shanar. East of the mountains few humans lived, for giant griffins roamed the basin of the great river Penderley named after himself.

Along the north coast Penderley's men settled, establishing the towns of Cromwell and Prebendswick. Their cannon slew monster griffins, and they converted thousands of awestruck natives to the true faith. Copper-skinned citizens adopted European crafts, quoted the Bible, bred cattle, and rode horses to victory over their foes.

By the 1690s, they were masters of their own seas and emboldened enough to sail for Oregon and Japan. Melnes, that great prophet, climbed the bell tower of the cathedral being built over General Penderley's grave, and watched as six ships captained by Abner Chethogyas vanished in the evening mists.

He shook his grey head. Never had one culture surrendered to another with more enthusiasm — not even Meiji Japan! As if it were fated . . .

A year later two vessels returned. The bishop learned that neither land could be found. "God the juggler," he muttered at the news. His aged hands were always cold, and he warmed them by cupping his mug of chimty. "Trust God not to be foxed by one debt-ridden time traveler. I'm no more than imagination, having made myself a native of this nowhere. I meant to raise a fuss and get rescued, and now I'm not even in the same universe!"

Captain Chethogyas rose from his knees. "Your Grace, God sent you to us. We know that, when you speak of England, you describe some part of heaven. The gifts you brought out of the clouds —"

"Whiskey and guns," Melnes remarked as aromatic vapors drifted about his face.

"And livestock and seed, books, clocks, and plows. You meant to change history, Your Grace, and so you have! Doubt not that the Lord hath cleared your integrity from any ends but His glory and our welfare in this lesser world. Because of your coming, our lives will never be the same. And now that so many have bled for you, and four ships lost, do not want courage. Adhere to us, oh last of your angelic race, praise Almighty Providence, and rejoice to hear of the new lands we've mapped, impossible though you say they are, where soon the Lord's Psalms will be loudly sung."

Melnes turned away to conceal the hopelessness that contorted his features. Tears welled in his eyes. "Yes, indeed. Psalms must be sung. In my discontent I was destined to serve General Penderley's God, nor is one crea-

tion wide enough for His cunning.”

“We all serve the One True God,” Abner Chethogyas murmured uncomfortably, and bowed his departure.

“Wait!” Melnes whirled. A fire lit his eyes. “We serve, but we wrestle! We fight! And always He gives us a way!”

“A way for you to return to heaven? We know your mind —”

“Be of good cheer, for I must abide here the rest of my life for the paradox to work! But why didn’t I think of this before? If my Melnesia is a dump for errant, uh, angels, then the fact that so many cultures exist . . . each must have had its founder!”

“So ’tis said. Nennu, the First City, was reared in the Abwe by the Magay Ka, who taught the First Folk to write in pictures. All nations prate of such heroes.”

“Like the Tarf! Swart giants, seven feet tall! I’ve heard the tale of their landfall on the isle we named Rothsillie. And what of the Cilni? There were no bald races on the Earth of my time — but in the far future . . .”

“Forgive me, Your Grace, but my wit lags behind your words.”

“A dump for time travelers! If each brought luggage, as I brought medicines . . . there may even be a time machine somewhere, wrapped in rags! If not, you’ll learn to make one, you or your sons! Abner, handsomest of men, dearer to me than the nine children of my flesh, swear me an oath and I shall make you king! You must wield strength and diplomacy to send forth excavators to Rothsillie and Nennu and the other sites. In the meantime, I’ll teach your scholars truths I’ve never unveiled before! Chemistry — the periodic chart of the elements! Evolution! Melnesia need not beg from Earth’s table for crumbs of science — I’ll lay bare five centuries in as many years!”

Abner squinted. “You would anoint me king?”

“For a promise. And tell your child, as he must tell his. When after my death your descendants learn to build a time machine, their first duty is to come back to this day, and create a paradox. Interrupt me, kill me, kidnap me one minute before I pour the oil on your head! An absolute paradox, for in **THIS** now —”

“I understand. No, I do not! Why —”

“**BECAUSE GOD WILL NOT PERMIT IT!** God created this universe, this N-Space bubble, to preserve His Earth from paradox. Did He create it after my misdemeanors? No, your land’s been recycled. Other time travelers came before me! Clearly even Almighty God finds it no slight thing to make a universe! Now to save Melnesia from my mischiefs, I’ll force Him to create another, or be rid of me some easier way! Three creations! Oh, I have Him now! Cleave to me, Abner! Teach your children well, and we’ll paint God into a corner! The last thing He wants is a Melnesian time machine. He’s not wanton with miracles, but He’ll *have* to —”

Abner gaped as Bishop Melnes glowed and shrank, as if falling down an infinitely long tunnel, so suddenly gone there was almost no time to flail his arms.



A wind swept the Thames and gusted up a warren of narrow London streets, imbued with the stench of low tide offal. Those who trudged against it clutched their coats with icy fingers, bent their heads, and struggled on — each alone among the crowd, none attentive to discover whether his neighbor might have materialized out of nowhere that very moment.

One of these pedestrians was so muffled that his shining features could not be recognized, even in brief daylight. For a minute he was distinguished from the others by an apparent lack of purpose, for first he stared at his hands, and then at the timbered buildings looming around him. Of a sudden he recognized where he was, and strode energetically eastward. He reached the gate to a courtyard. A haggard woman sat in his path.

"E equals em cee squared," the man whispered.

The woman spat. "Try your French on the clapper-dudgeons in yon house," she grumbled. "My fee is coin: good coin, good passage."

"I have none you would recognize. God has visited me with youth, but neither gold nor silver. Yet I breathe out my soul in grateful love, and would fain pass, and wish you a . . . a merry Christmas."

It was a guess, a stab at random, but the woman looked sad. "If you have heart to bid my Christmas merry, then God bless you. But la, sir, don't be soundin' so papist. Already I'm under watch for lettin' yon house to foreign folk."

"They expect me. I'm the one for whom they came."

The woman stood, hiked her skirts, and moved out of the way. Bishop Melnes picked through the miry court on agile, thirty-four-year-old legs. He rapped. The door cracked open. "E equals em cee squared," he repeated.

"Well, well — here in good time! We were worried about you; the natives said you were jailed awaiting trial. Shackled in irons! We were scared you might not get away. Not true, eh? What a relief! Job done, and back home to your own body! Excuse me, we really should hurry; time to chat on the other side. Step right in. Sit here, and let me attach these electrodes. . . ."

"Don't be nervous," Bishop Melnes responded. "I have it on Good Authority: nothing can go wrong, not any more."

"Easy for you to say! You've spent four years here, you've learned the lingo. You fit in."

"Four years?" The time traveler shrugged. "More than fifty! Fifty years and two hard lifetimes, but now I'm going home!"



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# H. P. LOVECRAFT: STILL ELDRITCH AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

LITERARY REVIEW

by Darrell Schweitzer

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*Darrell Schweitzer's horror fiction has appeared in The Twilight Zone magazine, Night Cry, and Amazing® Stories ("Transients" just recently appeared in our January 1987 issue). As for his interest in H. P. Lovecraft, he has published a reader's guide, The Dream Quest of H. P. Lovecraft (1978), and has edited a set of essays, Essays Lovecraftian (1971), the latter of which will be reissued by Starmont as Discovering H. P. Lovecraft.*

Fifty years ago, the intellectual and artistic adventure that was Howard Phillips Lovecraft's life came to an abrupt halt. Lovecraft, born in 1890, died on March 15, 1937, from a "grippe," which, undiagnosed almost to the very end, turned out to be intestinal cancer. He would have been forty-seven that August.

Lovecraft had a bad start in the world: his father was permanently hospitalized when Lovecraft was three, and his childhood and adolescence were smothered by a neurotically overprotective mother who once told him that he was so ugly he shouldn't go out much, lest he scare the neighbors. Declining family fortunes and illnesses, both real and imaginary, precluded college, and the first years of his manhood were spent as a virtual recluse, without any sort of job or much contact with any but a very narrow circle of acquaintances. He spent a great deal of his time writing pompously dreadful imitations of eighteenth-century verse. (The age of Johnson and Swift remained a lifelong fascination; Lovecraft always felt that he would have been happier as a landed English gentleman, circa 1740.) His mother encouraged what she thought was his poetic genius. Genius he was, albeit not a poetic one. He had been an amazing child prodigy, reading and giving poetry recitals at three, writing at four, and composing passable *Latin* by seven or so. However, it wasn't until he was in his later twenties that he began to develop, either as a writer or as a human being. That was when his mother was finally put away, leaving a bewildered Howard Lovecraft to discover the universe on his own.

And discover he did, becoming vastly self-educated, developing a wide circle of friends (nearly all of whom remembered him as the most remarkable person they had ever known), traveling as far from his native Rhode Island as Quebec and New Orleans, surviving a failed marriage in his thirties,

and quite unlike most people, becoming progressively *more* flexible and open-minded as he got older. As his biographer, L. Sprague de Camp, put it, Lovecraft managed to stay out of the madhouse, jail, and bread lines during the worst of the Great Depression. This has to be counted as something of an accomplishment.

But the reason that Lovecraft is anything more than an interesting psychological case study is that, around 1917, he began to write stories of the weird and terrible. There had been juvenile attempts, but serious efforts began with "The Tomb," a turgid, but effective tale of a maladjusted young man who is more at home with, and eventually possessed by, the spirits of his eighteenth-century ancestors. Much better fiction soon followed. "The Rats in the Walls" (1923) was immediately heralded by the editor and the readers of *Weird Tales* magazine as one of the strongest American horror stories since the days of Edgar Allan Poe. Most of Lovecraft's now-classic horror fiction, "The Dunwich Horror," "Pickman's Model," "Dreams in the Witch House," "The Shadow Over Innsmouth," and many others, were written within the next ten years. Late in life, he began to produce work which was incontestably science fiction, and startlingly innovative science fiction at that.

Lovecraft eventually wrote enough fiction to fill three thick hardcover volumes. This represents only a small portion of his output, which also includes essays of all sorts, a huge amount of poetry (perhaps five per cent of it tolerably good), and more letters than any other literary person in the twentieth century, if not in all of history, has ever composed. Some Lovecraftian epistles run to fifty pages of small print and amount to short books. Merely the *surviving* ones, if printed in their entirety, would fill about fifty standard-sized volumes.

His reputation continues to rest on his fiction. In his lifetime, Lovecraft saw print in amateur journals and in pulp magazines, especially *Weird Tales*, where he was a valued contributor. One of his very best stories, "The Colour Out of Space," appeared in *Amazing® Stories* in 1927. But, aside from one badly printed, amateur volume and a few anthology appearances, he had no book publication during his lifetime. It was only later that his friends collected his work into book form, August Derleth and Donald Wandrei founding the still-extant firm of Arkham House for this express purpose. Since then, first at Derleth's urging, and then out of sheer inertia as Lovecraft found an audience, numerous paperbacks, hardcovers, and translations followed.

This is nothing out of the ordinary. Many venerable pulp writers, nostalgically remembered by their first generation of readers, have made it into book form later. E. E. "Doc" Smith, Seabury Quinn, and Robert E. Howard spring immediately to mind.

But with Lovecraft, something extraordinary has happened. A vast body of critical literature has grown up. There is more secondary material on

Lovecraft than any such writer since Poe. S. T. Joshi's monumental *H. P. Lovecraft and Lovecraft Criticism, an Annotated Bibliography*, published by Kent State University Press in 1981, lists *six hundred and ninety-two* such items, not counting unpublished papers and academic theses. A recent supplement lists many more. Books about Lovecraft seem to appear at the rate of about one a year. A scholarly journal, *Lovecraft Studies*, flourishes. Lately, the leading Lovecraft scholar, Joshi, has subjected Lovecraft to the same sort of rigorous textual scholarship normally applied to Shakespeare, James Joyce, or William Faulkner, and has produced definitive versions of the three standard Lovecraft story collections, *The Dunwich Horror and Others*, *At the Mountains of Madness*, and *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales*, weeding out literally thousands of errors, and producing versions which, for the first time, give us what the author intended, and prove Lovecraft to be a better stylist than previously suspected.

Critical recognition abroad has been much greater than in the United States. It's a familiar story. Poe, too, was largely ignored at home until the French began to champion him as one of the very greatest American authors. Now, Lovecraft is published in Germany in the equivalent of Modern Library or Penguin Classics, alongside major figures of literature and philosophy. A German publisher once announced a plan to publish twelve volumes of Lovecraft's letters, not for some amateur fan audience, but for the general public. (None have yet appeared.) In Japan, Lovecraft's works are produced in lavish, boxed editions by the chief publisher of Zen texts. A few years ago, the city of Trieste sponsored an international Lovecraft conference, flying in experts from around the globe. This was regarded as an important cultural event. The French, as they did with Poe, have heralded Lovecraft as one of the American masters. Foreign critics, French, Spanish, and Italian, have been quoted as saying the most remarkable things (some verified, some not): that Lovecraft may be counted among the four greatest American writers *ever* (the other three were Poe, Ambrose Bierce, and Walt Whitman), or even that he ranks among the ten greatest ever produced by the human race, right up there with Homer and Shakespeare. The perennial Nobel-prize candidate Jorge Luis Borges, when surveying American literature, mentioned three "science fiction" writers he thought noteworthy: Ray Bradbury, Robert Heinlein, and H. P. Lovecraft. When Borges wrote a story in homage to Lovecraft ("There Are More Things," in *The Book of Sand*), this may have puzzled American mainstream critics, but to the original Spanish audience, Borges felt no need to explain. Lovecraft is widely known in Spanish-speaking countries as a standard, classic American author.

All of this is a long way from the pages of *Weird Tales*. After fifty years it is clear that Lovecraft has become a major figure on a worldwide scale. No other contributor to the science-fiction and fantasy magazines, in Lovecraft's generation or later, has ever achieved such recognition. Certainly,

people still enjoy some of his contemporaries. Howard and Burroughs may be more widely read, but no one has ever accused either of producing Serious Literature.

What makes Lovecraft so special? This bears serious examination.

Lovecraft was not fully appreciated in his lifetime, even by his admirers. His champion, August Derleth, was a woefully incompetent textual editor (Joshi reports finding between fifteen and forty-three errors *per page* in *At the Mountains of Madness*, ranging from word substitutions to the deletion of entire paragraphs), but he also clearly did not understand the works of his idol. His posthumous collaborations (stories written by Derleth from fragments or notes by Lovecraft) read more like painful parodies of Lovecraft, and the subsequent development of the Cthulhu mythos has led to banal trivialization of Lovecraftian concepts by generations of later writers, under the auspices of August Derleth.

The first major critic to notice Lovecraft was hardly an admirer. Edmund Wilson produced a withering blast in the pages of *The New Yorker*, declaring that the only horror in Lovecraft was "the horror of bad taste and bad art." But Wilson was hostile to virtually all imaginative or popular fiction. He made a complete fool of himself over Tolkien's *The Lord of Rings*. He tried to murder the entire mystery genre with an essay entitled "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" Today, his piece on Lovecraft may be found, reprinted for historical interest only, heavily annotated, in *H. P. Lovecraft: Four Decades of Criticism*, edited by the indefatigable Joshi (Ohio University Press, 1980).

More disappointingly, the first generation of science-fiction critics could not see beyond the superficial trappings of Lovecraft's fiction, and regarded him as a gothic anachronism, an embarrassing enthusiasm of a few older, uncritical readers. To prove their maturity, the first science-fiction critics bore down hard on the old pulp favorites — Burroughs, Merritt, and Lovecraft. In his classic *In Search of Wonder* (1956, revised 1967), Damon Knight is strikingly and uncharacteristically imperceptive, making no distinction between real Lovecraft fiction and the bogus Derlethian collaborations (the passage he quotes as a horrid example is by Derleth), and showing no awareness at all that Lovecraft was trying to do anything but say, "Boo!" to his readers. Intelligent criticism of Lovecraft in the United States is mostly a recent phenomenon. Aside from a few scattered articles, the bulk of it has appeared since the death of August Derleth in 1971, and most of the best books have come in the past decade. Layer after layer of misapprehension has been stripped away, and now it becomes clear *why* Lovecraft, and none of his contemporaries, has had such an extraordinary posthumous career.

*Lovecraft was a thinker of uncommon depth.* It is possible to call him a philosopher without flinching. He certainly was as much a philosopher as H. G. Wells or Olaf Stapledon, who have always been respected, not merely

as fiction writers, but as thinkers. Like them, Lovecraft infused all his work with a coherent system of belief. His fiction, essays, those mountains of letters, and even much of his poetry form a vast whole. He was, as de Camp has stated, a formidable exponent of his own brand of mechanistic materialism.

Despite his reputation as a supernaturalist, Lovecraft never had the slightest faith in the supernatural, of either the conventionally religious or the occult varieties. His outlook, almost from childhood, was that of a scientist. He wrote that life is merely an electrochemical process that ceases utterly at death. Man is a random occurrence in a random and chaotic universe, and as modern science — especially Einstein's theories of relativity — reveals ever vaster mysteries, we cannot escape the conclusion of our utter insignificance.

His fiction is uniformly an expression of this view. He wrote to the editor of *Weird Tales*:

All my stories are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos at large. To me there is nothing but puerility in a tale in which the human form — and the local human passions and conditions and standards — is depicted as native to other worlds or other universes. To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good or evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind have any existence at all.

Like Poe, Lovecraft expounded his literary/aesthetic theories at length, then practiced what he preached. His famous "The Colour Out of Space" is about an intrusion from the vast Outside (as Lovecraft was fond of calling it) in the form of a meteorite that displays no known spectrum or chemical properties and emits a force (which may or may not be considered alive, but is certainly not organic in any earthly sense) that proceeds to absorb and destroy pigs, cows, trees, humans, grass, and insects with complete indifference before renewing itself and taking off for the stars again.

Lovecraft's supernaturalism is mechanistic. Since he did not believe in ghosts or demons, he could not write about them convincingly, so he was forced to develop a whole new kind of horror story, which, more often than not, bordered on science fiction. The most exquisite horror for a thinking person, according to Lovecraft, is the intrusion of some representative of the vast and uncaring universe into the placid little world of human existence. The frightening abnormality is not that of shambling zombies or chain-clanking ghosts as much as a suspension of natural law. Fear comes not so much from the immediate danger of being chased by spooks as from what it would have to *imply* if such spooks existed. Lovecraft's characters go

to great lengths to deny what they see, to cling to some shred of rationality, only to be overwhelmed. His vastly original monsters (nothing so *trite* as a zombie or a vampire in evening dress) are utterly inhuman beings who symbolize the forces of the uncaring cosmos. The irony of our existence, says Lovecraft, is that we are precisely clever enough to discover how helpless and unimportant we are. The belief in any sort of deity who will look after us is, therefore, sheerest wish fulfillment.

Fritz Leiber has called Lovecraft "a literary Copernicus," since he turned the horror story away from the mankind-centered world toward the whole universe. Some wit has suggested that Lovecraft was the first person to experience Future Shock. Some of his more philosophically inclined admirers try to make him out as a pre-existentialism existentialist.

Lovecraft might have called himself an Epicurean. (He was a classicist, and knew precisely what that meant.) He held that the sole purpose in life is *aesthetic* pleasure. In daily living, this meant clinging to tradition and traditional ideas of decorum. In literature, this meant writing that appeals to a sense of beauty, to adventurous expectancy, or to other basic, deeply felt emotions. He did not write fiction to preach, or even to expound his philosophy. He believed in art for art's sake, as did Poe and Oscar Wilde, and quoted Wilde to this effect: "All art is basically useless."

*Lovecraft took his writing seriously.* It was, after all, the focus of his life. There is a playful element in Lovecraft, even a wry sense of humor (tipping the hat to his friend and fellow *Weird Tales* author Clark Ashton Smith by referring to him in "The Whisperer in Darkness" as "the Atlantean priest, Klarkash Ton"), but, in an environment of hack formula-writers and lowest-common-denominator publishing (pulp magazines, as a class, had a terrible reputation, much of it deserved), he wrote carefully, measuring every word. He had stylistic faults, certainly. Too often he would synopsise rather than develop a dramatic scene, and he was addicted to rare adjectives: *squamous*, *rugose*, and most especially *eldritch*, which he loved dearly. At his worst he wrote some of the most florid prose *to survive* from the pulp magazines, but he was vastly more sophisticated than his contemporaries. He believed that atmosphere, rather than jaunty action, was the key element of a fantastic tale, and so he strove for subtle aesthetic effects when most of his fellow writers, not to mention the readers, scarcely understood such concepts, much less cared about them.

For example, Jack Williamson, writing in *Amazing Stories* in 1930, opened his serial "The Green Girl" in the approved pulp manner:

At high noon on May 4, 1999, the sun went out!

Lovecraft begins "The Colour Out of Space" with a rolling, cadenced description:



West of Arkham the hills rise wild, and there are valleys with deep woods that no axe has ever cut. There are dark narrow glens where the trees slope fantastically, and where thin brooklets trickle without ever having caught the glint of sunlight. On the gentler slopes there are farms, ancient and rocky, with squat, moss-coated cottages brooding eternally over old New England secrets in the lee of great ledges; but these are vacant now, the wide chimneys crumbling and the shingled sides bulging perilously beneath low gambrel roofs.

Lovecraft's was not a modern style. Reading him, it is hard to remember that he is a contemporary of Ernest Hemingway. His prose was modeled on the writers of his beloved eighteenth century — Samuel Johnson, Addison and Steele, and Edward Gibbon — and also on Poe and two contemporary fantasists he admired tremendously, Arthur Machen (1863-1947) and Lord Dunsany (1878-1957). But he wrote that way deliberately, composing his tales as carefully as sonnets. He wrote what he had to say as well as he could, and refused to make any concessions to popular taste or commercial formulas. He tried to convince himself that he didn't care if anyone but a few friends ever read his efforts, but never managed to do so. (He took rejections badly, and he went into fits of depression which he wouldn't have suffered if he truly didn't care.) Rather than "sell out," he did overt hack-work, revising for pay the mostly hopeless efforts of amateur writers. He certainly made career blunders — failing to submit to magazines other than *Weird Tales*, and, incredibly, failing even to type up his superb novel, *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, when a major hardcover publisher asked to see a novel from him — but he managed to keep his art pure and undiluted. By a happy coincidence, he happened to be a better and more substantial writer than he ever knew he was. The integrity of his work was important to *him*. The work itself, it turns out, is important to a wide readership all around the world.

So Lovecraft's reputation seems secure. He was certainly not as great as Homer or Shakespeare. Such statements are absurd, if the foreign critics who are alleged to have made them actually did. He is not one of the top four American writers either, but he might fit well in a list of the top one hundred. He is, so far, the leading American supernatural horror writer for the twentieth century. He has already overtaken all the writers he once regarded as his ineffably superior masters — Dunsany, Machen, Algernon Blackwood, M. R. James — and is well on his way to at least matching Poe. He is certainly the most important writer ever to contribute to the science-fiction and fantasy genre magazines.

In a broader sense, he is on a level with Borges or Franz Kafka. If Borges's endless Library of Babel and Kafka's character transformed into a giant vermin are essential touchstones of the twentieth-century experience, then so, too, is Lovecraft's vast, cosmic alienation myth. In Lovecraft we see the

mankind isolated on the tiny speck of Earth, amid incomprehensible, limitless darkness. Even the galactic empires of science fiction, on Lovecraft's scale of things, are local, trifling affairs.

The most important Lovecraftian publications in recent years have been, without a doubt, the Joshi-edited, revised texts. Arkham House has issued handsome new hardcover editions of *The Dunwich Horror* and *At the Mountains of Madness* (1984, 1985; \$15.95 and \$16.95, respectively), with *Dagon and Other Macabre Tales* to follow shortly. These three comprise the entire body of Lovecraft's fiction, outside of some revisions of other people's work (which amount to collaborations) and assorted fragments, prose poems, parodies, etc. A forthcoming *Miscellaneous Writings*, edited by Joshi, will contain his major essays. Five volumes of *Selected Letters* (representing about five per cent of the extant letters) were published between 1965 and 1976. All but volume III are currently in print. Recently a booklet, *Uncollected Letters*, appeared from Necronomicon Press (1986, \$5.95).

The most interesting critical study in the past few years has been the Star-mont Reader's Guide #13, *H. P. Lovecraft* by the ever-industrious Joshi, which could have been entitled *Lovecraft the Philosopher*. It does an admirable job of demonstrating the overall coherence of Lovecraft's thought and work. Donald Burleson's *H. P. Lovecraft: A Critical Study* (Greenwood Press, 1983, \$29.95) is more a matter of This is What Lovecraft Wrote, and This is What Donald Burleson Thinks of It, a mass of story synopses and short comments, without any overall plan; far less useful, but factually accurate, this book offers occasional insights and rare nuggets of information.

One of the stranger developments is that Lovecraft is the protagonist in two new novels. He has appeared in fiction before. Since Lovecraft playfully wrote his friends into his stories sometimes, it isn't surprising that they returned the compliment. Robert Bloch killed him hideously in an early story, "The Shambler from the Stars" (*Weird Tales*, 1935), provoking the similarly ghastly demise of Robert Blake in Lovecraft's "The Hunter of the Dark" shortly thereafter. Clark Ashton Smith used Lovecraft as a character once.

But these were essentially in-jokes, not for the general readership. In two recent books, the figure of Lovecraft is very deliberately evoked, the interest deriving from a continuing fascination with his personality, quite aside from what he wrote. This is facilitated by the awesome, almost stupefying detail in which his life has been documented. (So much so that a joke title in a Tim Kirk cartoon, "H. P. Lovecraft, His Choice in Socks," is not as ridiculous as it sounds; they were probably black or a plain, conservative gray. In any case, we know how Lovecraft managed to survive on \$1.80 worth of groceries a week, where he stayed, what his opinions were on every conceivable subject, when was the last time he rode a bicycle, what books were in his library, what movies he saw and with whom, etc., etc., etc.) He exists on pa-

per in far more detail than most fictional characters, and as novels with famous people in them are always popular, the result is inevitable.

Peter Cannon's *Pulptime* (Weirdbook Press, 1984, hardcover \$15.00, paperback \$5.00) has proven so successful it's in its second printing. In this one, H. P. Lovecraft meets Sherlock Holmes, as the Great Detective, now in his seventies, comes to New York circa 1925 and enlists the help of Lovecraft and his circle in a particularly difficult case. Cannon, a Lovecraft scholar of note, has gone to great lengths, incorporating *real* Lovecraftian conversations and excerpts from Lovecraft's letters into the dialogue, and using as many authentic incidents, characters, and settings as possible. It's all in good fun, and thoroughly convincing, highlighted by an outrageous scene in which Lovecraft and the fantasy writer Frank Belknap Long nearly have their covers blown in a speakeasy by the tipsy poet Hart Crane. The plot, however, leaves a lot to be desired. It lacks complication. The villain gives up much too easily.

By contrast, *Lovecraft's Book* by Richard Lupoff (Arkham House, 1985, \$15.95) has opposite flaws and virtues. Lupoff is a professional fiction writer and knows how to plot. His story moves and is a pretty good mystery/intrigue effort in its own right. But the Lovecraft character is no more convincing than the H. G. Wells of the movie *Time After Time*, a famous name and little more. There is even a scene in which Lovecraft gets drunk (during Prohibition, no less!), whereas the real H. P. Lovecraft, like Dracula, never drank . . . wine. (Actually, he was more fond of a cup of coffee with five lumps of sugar.) The plot, involving the early Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan, makes entirely too much of Lovecraft's alleged racism. Lovecraft's attitudes toward foreigners and minorities were like Shakespeare's toward Jews in *The Merchant of Venice*. They passed without comment at the time, but have since become unacceptable. And as he got older and met more people of different backgrounds, he began to shed his prejudices one by one. At one point he even naively wrote of blacks, "certainly no one could wish them *any harm*." The Lupoff novel, while adequate as fiction, only distorts the memory of Lovecraft the man, but at the same time it underlines his importance, trading as it does on instant recognition of the name. ●

## O CIVILE

O Civile, si ergo  
fortibus es in ero.  
O Nobile, demos trux  
sivat sinem causen dux.

— Sister M. Anne Arkee, O.S.F.

# UPHILL CLIMB

by Robert J. Sawyer  
art: George Barr



*The author works as a full-time free-lance writer and as a broadcaster. He has recently sold stories to The Village Voice, to the anthology 100 Great Fantasy Short Short Stories (edited by Asimov, Carr, and Greenberg), and now to Amazing® Stories. In January, 1986, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation aired a three-hour history of science fiction written and narrated by the author.*

*He and his wife, Carolyn, live in Toronto, Canada. And his interests include dinosaurs, film, computers, and Greek and Roman archaeology; he also claims to have an unnatural fondness for pizza.*

"Service!" Livingstone Kivley lobbed his last tennis ball across the sagging net. At the sidelines, in the shade of the old brownstone office building, stood young Obno. She was thin for a Quintaglio, no more than 400 kilos, a dwarf tyrannosaur with nervous, darting eyes of polished obsidian. Kivley's opponent was a blue boxlike robot. The little machine swatted the ball with a nylon racquet. Kivley swung, missed, swore. Obno spoke to the robot, using the sublanguage her people reserved for talking to beasts and gods. It rolled on rubber treads to the net, lifted it, slipped under, and dutifully collected the balls.

Kivley turned his face up at Obno in what he hoped the alien would read as mock despair. "Oh, the humiliation! I've been playing tennis for sixty years and your overgrown milk crate whips the pants off me." The blue box rolled up to Kivley and deposited three fuzzy spheres at his besneakered feet. Kivley saw the hurt look in the Quintaglio's eyes. "I'm kidding, Obno. You've done a fine job."

Obno didn't look much happier. "The robot is capable of many other complex tasks." She walked over to Kivley, lazy summer sun glinting off the scale vestiges embedded in her leathery hide. "It can work in manufacturing, run errands, look after infants, be a courier."

"Was it expensive to make?"

"This prototype? Yes. But the design is entirely solid-state, except for the treads and arms. We could sell them for walnuts."

"Peanuts," corrected Kivley. He reached a hand up to the alien's shoulder. "It's an excellent piece of work."

Obno slapped her tail against the asphalt. "Not excellent. Not even adequate. True, the robotic software is years beyond what your race has yet produced, but the treads cannot negotiate slopes greater than a rise of one meter in a run of twelve."

Kivley felt a twinge in his back as he went to his knees and inspected the endless belts of corded rubber under the robot. "That's what? Five degrees? Good! Entirely sufficient."

The Quintaglio's muzzle peeled back in a grimace, showing serrated teeth. "It's impractical. The machine cannot go up those stairs human architects are so fond of. You must allow me time to develop a more versatile locomotor system."

"No. Out of the question." He rose slowly to his feet. "We'll market them as is."

"As is?"

"Absolutely. The full energies of the Combinatorics Corporation shall be bent to the task." He wiped his hands on his tattered tennis shorts. "People will buy any good labor-saving device, no?" Kivley knew that Obno was going to remind him — again! — that the Quintaglios had bestowed a great trust upon him when they gave him the job of supervising the introduction of their technology to Earth. She did not disappoint him. He shrugged. "It's

a living.”

“But Combinatorics was to have been an altruistic undertaking.”

“Altruistic this shall be.”

“Yet I feel that —”

“That we should be providing something more important than electronic gophers?” Kivley hefted his racquet and headed towards the old office building.

“Precisely!” Obno scooped up the the robot and tucked it under one rubbery arm. They walked around to the glass-fronted entrance. Obno was up the three stairs in one stride; for Kivley, it took a trio of little hops. “So much we could do for humankind,” said Obno.

“One step at a time, my friend. One step at a time.”

Kivley trudged through the snow on his way in from the bus stop. He passed dozens of the little blue robots chugging to and fro on the sidewalk, tiny plows attached to their fronts. Kivley looked up at the sound of Obno *kaflumping* across the drifts towards him. “I had an idea last night that will improve the robots,” Obno said, lashing her muff-wrapped tail violently to fight the cold. “If we install cleats on pistons, they could climb over small obstacles.”

Kivley continued to walk. “We’ve sold many robots so far, no?”

Obno nodded, an acquired human gesture. “Thousands each month. The fabricators aboard the mother ship are having trouble keeping up with the demand.”

“Then let’s leave well enough alone.”

Obno’s sigh was a massive white cloud in the cold air. “I know little of capitalism, but isn’t it bad business to make customers install ramps at great expense?”

“It’s a small price to pay. Our robots can save their owners thousands of dollars.” He nodded. “You can get people to do almost anything if they think they’re saving a buck.”

Kivley stared out of his third-floor office window. Crocuses were blooming along the edge of the sidewalk. He heard a knock and swiveled to see Obno squeezing through the mahogany door frame.

“Here!” She slapped a hardcopy sheet on his desk.

“What is it?” asked Kivley, rummaging through the clutter for his reading glasses.

“It’s a letter from IBM. They want to purchase the right to manufacture robots like ours.” Her voice took on an edge. “But with *legs*.”

“You object to the machines requiring ramps, Obno.” He tried to put a question mark at the end of the sentence, but it didn’t quite make it past his lips.

“I am shamed by the inefficiency. Since we introduced them three years

ago, nearly all public buildings in the industrial portions of this planet have had to be modified to accommodate the growing robot population.”

“Very well,” said Kivley, nodding, as he gave the letter a quick looking over. “Sell the patent. Ask whatever seems fair.”

Obno spluttered, a loud, sticky sound. “But you didn’t let me —!”

Kivley swiveled around to look out at the street again. He gestured Obno to the window. A pretty woman rolled happily along the sidewalk in her wheelchair and up the gentle ramp into the building.

Obno smiled at last.



## THE EELS

Astonishing creatures  
never grounded in pain, they migrate  
through the sheen weather shimmering around them.

Their riot leaves breathless amphibians  
falling in a posture suggestive of electrocution.

Imagine a tempest numbing a landscape with silver!

There are rumors of beasts sheathed in a galvanized climate,  
of oceans shocked into frost and foam.

But the eels continue their bright migration  
ignorant of the effect of friction upon amber.  
Aloof as the bunched purple cumulonimbus that wrecks cities,

then rolls away innocent as anvils, ah, roiling

brilliant as charged nickel  
upon a stunned environment, eels

exciting as thunderheads  
cavort over the sea bottom leaking amperes of immeasurable lightning.

— Shelton Arnel Johnson

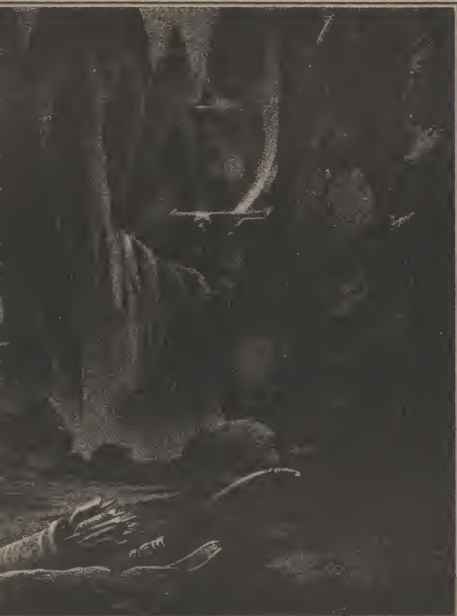
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# ***A Tale at Rilling's Inn***



by Nancy Varian Berberick





Art: Stephen E. Fabian

*The author lives in Blairstown, NJ, a small, rural town in the west Jersey hills. She, her husband, and their collie share living space in a 130-year-old house.*

*As for her writing, the author informs us that she has been writing short stories for as long as she can remember. However, it was only in November of 1984, with the encouragement and support of her husband, that she decided to leave the business world and attempt a career as a writer. Since that decision, she has sold a story to Beyond, a small-press magazine, and to DRAGON® Magazine. And, now, of course, one to Amazing® Stories.*

Hinthan was drunk again. Slapping my shoulder, he laughed at no jest that I could see, and claimed another flagon of the landlord's fine, strong wine. He was unsteady upon his legs when he pushed himself away from the long trestle which was the inn's bar. I thought it best to keep him in my sight, and followed a step or two behind.

Rilling's Inn was filled with folk, men and a few of my own dwarfish kind, who sought to pass an evening with friends and good drink. It was a cold, rain-swept night, and gusts of weeping wind chilled the Great Room each time the thick wooden door was opened. I trailed behind my friend, pausing to listen to the foolish exchanges he made with some folk, and steering him safely away from those who would not kindly bear interruption. I was glad when he finally joined the game of dice which occupied the men at the table nearest the hearth.

Gambling does not hold much interest for me, and judging by Hinthan's unsteady hand and slackening wits, it would be wise if one of us remained aloof from the dice. I called for the pot boy to bring me a pint of ale, and settled alone at a table near the window.

He was a fine man, my friend. Nay! He still is, for all that drunkenness is his favored condition when he can get that way. He is a clever hunter and, when we can find buyers for our swords, a hearty warrior. But before these things, he is a friend, fair-spoken and honest-dealing.

Yet Hinthan has come to an evil pass. And though he casts no blame, it was my own hand which brought him there.

I brooded over my ale as I watched Hinthan at his game. He was still clad in his rusty brown and green hunting leathers, for he had essayed a last trip into the forest this morning when the weather was still fine. That hunt had been more for pleasure than for business, and so its failure rankled not at all. Better fortune awaited us upon the morrow. We have sold our swords again to Lord Erich, and that eager lord would begin his last foray before winter into his neighbor's lands in the morning.

Loud cheers and laughter arose from the tables near the gamblers. Men

from several tables away joined in the merriment at the expense of one whom they all knew was losing. My eyes were drawn toward Hinthan.

As I watched, he got to his feet. It was no easy thing for him to do, for he had succumbed to most of the flagon's wine. He supported himself upon the table with one hand, weaving where he stood. Raising his free hand, he shook his head.

"Enough!" His voice was slurred, but I could hear the steel of anger rising. "Enough! You've taken nearly all that I have. Let me retire in peace!"

Several of his companions laughed again, and one jeered, "Come, hunter, there must be more!"

"Aye," Hinthan growled. "And if there is, with me it will stay." So saying, he shoved himself away from the table. He made a stumbling journey to a place near the hearth where he sat upon the floor. It did not seem to have been his intention, but his legs would carry him no farther in safety.

The pot boy, passing my table and having an eye to the gamers who were murmuring among themselves, leaned close to me.

"You might do your friend a favor, Garroc. Those fellows look ruffianly enough to check for themselves whether he is all out."

"I yet have my eyes about me, lad."

The boy grinned and shrugged. "Well you may, Garroc. But it is clear to all that Hinthan has not his wits about him!"

"Tend to your pots, boy!"

Laughing, he was gone, scampering off to answer the calls of others. But his warning was well placed, for his companions now eyed Hinthan as one ripe for plucking. Leaving my ale, I crossed the Great Room to their table.

"Has my friend left you owing?"

The gamers looked from me to Hinthan, lying senseless and too near the hearth for comfort. Their glances shifted among themselves and then to my hand where it lay near the little dagger at my belt. I offered no threat as yet, but there was promise. They shook their heads.

"Then we will leave him in peace, as he asks."

They offered no protest, for all that they were four and I only one. This was not the time or the place to roll a drunk for his few coins. Still, lest they reconsider themselves, I joined Hinthan and settled him more comfortably away from the fire.

It might have appeared a guardian's stance that I took up. Aye, in part it was. But it was more. Hinthan stands by me in the bitter fires of war. Then he is generous and brave; then he forsakes his wine. It is little enough that I can sit beside him in the cold hungers of peace. He deserves better of me than guardianship. He is yet a good man and a better friend, despite the place of grief in which he dwells. My loyalty is no burden.

I stilled his murmuring questions, took a seat near him, and waited until he slept again. I could not get him from the Great Room now with any dignity. He was too big and unwieldy for my strength. But I could sit with him

and wait until his wits came dragging back. I have done it before and, the gods know, I will do it again.

My thoughts are ever the same at these times. This night they were no different. They turned back to the time when Hinthan and I journeyed upon a quest and found that which we both would have left undiscovered.

There is a stonemason in this village. He is an old man of the southern kind. They call themselves Blacklings and are well named, for their skin is as dark as ebony night. P'ajar is his name, and he is a friend to Hinthan and to me.

It had begun innocently enough the previous spring. The most recent campaign of Lord Erich was over. Though it was not a success, Hinthan and I came through it together. But we were not enriched by it. Our hire was to have been paid from the spoils of Erich's victory. No spoils, no hire. We were left in bitter straits. Hinthan turned to hunting again, provisioning the inn when he could. I was saved from the ignominy of beggary by the good P'ajar who, despite his own meager living, claimed that he could always use a dwarf's hand in his shop.

It is not a labor I love, stoneworking. I am skilled enough at it, as are all of my kind. The old blood runs true even now. But I am a warrior, a soldier, and I am accustomed to making my way by the virtues of my sword and axe. Stoneworking is the craft of old men, and I chafed bitterly at having to do it, much as I appreciated the chance to earn some little living by the sufferance of the Blackling.

The sun had not yet risen upon an early spring morning when P'ajar invited Hinthan and me to break our fast with him at the inn. Hinthan's hunting had lately been unsuccessful. It would not have needed the Blackling's gentle courtesy to convince us to be his guests for meal. We put away our food quickly enough, for Hinthan wished to take advantage of the fine day and I had some few tasks awaiting me at the stonemason's shop.

"But wait," P'ajar begged as we made out thanks and got ready to leave. "There is something I would propose to you both."

From within his tunic the Blackling withdrew an old and yellowed parchment. He looked carefully around us, seemed satisfied that we were alone in this early hour, and leaned forward. A smile lighted his old face.

"Listen, my friends, and I think that you will hear that which is to your advantage, as well as my own."

I glanced at Hinthan. The decision to stay must be his. This was his best time to hunt, in the misty morning when night creatures are retiring. For my part, the tasks which awaited me would grow no larger for the waiting. I cared not if we passed a pleasant hour with the stonemason. Hinthan drew out his pipe, filled it, and sat back.

"Say on, P'ajar. There is a light in your eyes which speaks of something interesting." He tossed the pouch to me, but I declined. My own pipe had

been broken days before, and I lacked even the small price to pay for a new one. Bitter straits indeed!

"Very good, my friends!" P'ajar's black eyes rested upon me, for he had noted my lack of a pipe. "And Garroc, perhaps you may be able to replace that pipe of yours yet!"

Maps and myths, ancient treasures, gold and jewels beyond counting — all these colored our friend's speech.

"I am no loremaster," he said. "But as you both well know, I have an interest in the legends of others. There is an ancient treasure, my friends, in the far mountains, and this map will show us where."

Dwarfish treasure, he said, the legendary wealth of the ancient kings of my own diminished race. From his speech it would seem that this treasure lay for the picking in the northern mountains. As P'ajar spun his tale, weaving slim certainty among the threads of legend, I could see Hinthan's eyes lighting. He was restive, as was I. His blood quickened with the return of spring. Though Rilling was our home in times of peace, it was not one either of us dwelt in long without feeling the stirring of restlessness.

P'ajar wove lovely pictures and dim possibilities, and Hinthan was soon captivated. It was in my mind that I knew better and must keep my hard head for the both of us.

"Garroc!"

Hinthan leaned across the table and, his grey eyes bright with mischief and the sparkle of adventure promised, reached to tweak gently at the end of my beard.

A familiar gesture, aye! It has been his way of catching my attention for as long as I have known him: a dancing twitch of long brown fingers and the gleam of prankish humor in his eyes. I have known Hinthan since he was a lad. As a child of seven years, surely no more, he first came to me. He was a wild thing, bereft of any kin after war made a bloody sweep across the land and destroyed his village. The boy was a pitiful creature, all thin legs and starved eyes. But he had come to join the army of the defenders, for he had heavy deaths to avenge.

He crept quickly enough into my heart, and dwelt under my protection for many years. The need was fulfilled and fell away to make room for an impudent affection which grew to become friendship. Now he is a man grown, though still young to me. The dwarfish folk count a man who has seen fifty summers just barely grown, and Hinthan has not come near that age. He balances in my heart somewhere between friend and son. And for all his score and fifteen, it was that impudent lad who dwelt in his grey eyes now.

"Garroc, have you been listening?"

"Aye," I said, though I had long abandoned the Blackling's tale. I did not wish to cause him offense, but there was little of substance and much air in the story P'ajar had been spinning.

The stonemason smiled gently. "He has been listening, friend Hinthan, and judging as well. What do you think, Garroc?"

I shook my head. "Forgive me, P'ajar. You are a good friend, and I know that we both owe you many debts of kindness. Yet I would do you no service if I told you that I believe in your hopes of ancient treasure."

"But the map!"

Aye, the map. I had to admit that it looked authentic. It was certainly ancient enough to have come from that far time when dwarfish kings reigned in the mountains to the north. And the treasure lived in legend at least. But in this world? I did not think so.

"How did you come by this map, P'ajar?"

The old man shrugged. "Delving here and there. Careful questions and slow finding. It is real enough, Garroc. This I believe. And if you and Hinthan will take up my commission, for I would hire you both and pay you an even share of the find, you will not be the losers."

Again I glanced at Hinthan. I knew by the eager light in his eyes and the determination which shaped his face that he would take up this commission, even if I would not.

"What's to lose, Garroc?" Hinthan did not strive to hide his enthusiasm. "There is no prospect of employment here for some time. If Erich is going to move against his neighbors again, it will not be until the season is well advanced. Why languish here when we could be —" He paused. Keen as he was for this adventure, even he could not finish that thought.

I completed it for him. "When we could be enriching ourselves from legends?"

Hinthan shrugged. "Or at least out and doing something."

"Aye, well, that is about all that we can expect from this venture: fine exercise."

They both knew me well enough to take my words for agreement. Why not? P'ajar supported me out of friendship. There was barely enough work to keep him occupied in his little shop. He had no real need for an assistant. At least I could do this for him. And if we came back with no more than we left, what was the harm?

Grinning, Hinthan twitched my beard again and winked at P'ajar. "See, my friend? He is not hard to convince. And Garroc is right: if nothing else, we will have ourselves in fine trim for Erich's next campaign."

Still, it was clear to me that each of them was confident that our quest would gain us more.

And so, upon a clear, sweet-smelling morning in the spring, Hinthan again took up his sword and bow, and I my own sword and the axe that I loved best, and we set out upon P'ajar's commission.

It was a long journey to the foothills of the heights which crowned the land. The roads were free of bandits and like vermin which thrived in the cli-

mate of lawlessness which the quarreling lords had brought upon us. This was good fortune, and we used it to our advantage, making our best speed. We knew that the journey could become dangerous once we left the road and began our climb up the mountain's feet, across its knees, and finally to that bare, stony face which P'ajar's map told us held the entrance to the fabled treasure houses of my far sires.

Our final journey to the mountain's entrance took us through long and winding chasms. A river which no longer lived had eaten these chasms from the rock of the mountain's bones. Years uncounted the waters had toiled, flowing and singing as they rushed to their resting place in the far seas. Small we felt, and small we were, venturing the stony paths of the dead river's bed. The walls of the chasm soared above us, leaping far out of our sight. When we would look up, a blue slit of sky was all that we could see.

Hinthan took a young man's joy in the journey. He was glad of the sun and the clear mountain air, and amused himself, and me, as we went by, calling up visions of the fabulous wealth he hoped to find, and laying before me even more wonderful plans for the spending of it.

"Have a care, Hinthan," I warned. "The larger your schemes, the heavier you will feel their loss."

"You do not believe in P'ajar's treasure, do you?" He had heard my arguments before this, but still it seemed to amaze him that I had not yet come 'round to belief.

"P'ajar's treasure, is it? Nay, my friend. It is dwarfish treasure. But not even that," I said, bethinking myself. "It is legend's treasure."

Hinthan tossed aside that part of my words which would cast shadows upon his dreams of riches. "Garroc, I did not ask before, and perhaps I should have: do you feel that you are entering upon some sacrilege? It is one thing for me to invade the past of your people. But what of you?"

I shrugged and smiled. "Well, if it is the past of my own folk, I imagine that I will commit no trespass by entering in."

"There *is* a treasure." It was not a question, yet no longer a certain belief.

"Let us say that there *was* a treasure. There was a great mountain kingdom, Hinthan. There was a time, in the long past, when my people ruled these northern lands from the gods' fortresses."

"The gods' fortresses?"

"Aye, so these mountains were called. But that was many ages ago. We are a foundering race, now, and we will not increase again. They committed some wild folly, my old fathers, and so we diminish."

He had heard these tales before, and others of my people, over lonely campfires. My words were not new to him. But it may be that now they took on larger life here, at the gate of the ancient dwarfish home. "What folly, Garroc?"

"Legend says 'folly.' It does not expound. Who knows? Surely no one remembers now."

He fell silent then, tasting the sadness of a race's passing. For myself, I was not untouched by the sadness. But something else was working in me, despite my own warning to my friend. I, the small son of ancient dwarfish kings, felt the blood course through my veins more quickly than it had before. The soaring beauty through which we traveled was working its magic upon me. It was not long before anthems of wonder rang in my heart. I was a wanderer returning home after lifelong journeys. And yet, never before had I seen this place.

Soon the way grew more difficult. Our feet, booted stoutly though they were, turned upon the stones and debris which lay in the vanished river's bed. We walked many miles, I in wonder, and Hinthan with care. He became my guide in that place, for soon I had no eyes for maps or trails. I could only stare about me, letting the legends of old breathe their forgotten songs in my heart.

"It is here, Garroc, that we must turn aside." Hinthan moved into one of the shafts of sunlight which pierced the rocky gloom of the chasm. So bright was the light that he shaded his eyes in order to read the ancient map. I turned away from the leaping walls of stone and the wonderful steps and terraces.

"You have found the entrance!"

"So says the map. Look!"

Drawing close to him, I read over his shoulder while he sat upon his heels. I picked out the place where we were, and found, in the spidery, ancient writing of some long dead dwarf, a landmark which was rendered more boldly than any other. A towering structure, it seemed, and one formed by dwarfish craft rather than by nature's. Squinting in the bright light of the sun's shaft, I looked about me, seeking the perspective which would show me the boldly rendered landmark.

"There!" I cried, pointing across the chasm's floor and what would have been upstream did a river live here. Hinthan leaned forward, shading his eyes again.

"Aye, Garroc, I think you are right." He glanced once more at the map, then carefully rolled it and returned it to his pouch. "It is behind that structure, or so says the map, that the hidden entrance to the treasure house lies."

Hinthan straightened his bow and quiver where they lay across his back, and slapped my shoulder. "Come along, Garroc. If the legends are true, we will find great wonders within."

"If the legends are true, and if there is an entrance."

He laughed. "Well, we shall see soon enough."

There was an entrance, for the map did not lie. It was a small cave's mouth. So small was it that I, who am shorter, though broader, than my friend, had to bend low to enter. Hinthan entered upon his knees, crabbing



forward until the cave's roof rose high enough to accommodate him. He took the makings of torches from his pouch and lighted the stout branches we had gathered from the chasm's floor.

"Where now?" I asked. My eyes were adjusting slowly to the cool gloom of the cave.

"That we must leave to fortune, Garroc. It seems the map abandons us here."

"Aye, well, then." I traced the length of my war axe with my finger tips. *Let no ghost, I thought, peering into the darkness, be discomforted. I am a dwarfish son, and I return to an ancient home.* I did not speak the words aloud for fear of sparking Hinthan's laughter. But I spoke them truly in my heart, for around me I could hear the rustling of lives long ago spent. I felt a cold breathing and listened for words. There were none to hear. If Hinthan heard these stirrings of dead souls, he gave no sign, but moved cautiously forward.

Beauty lay all about us, running in the light of our torches. Caverns soared out of sight. The walls swept out around us, and veins of gold and crystal danced in the orange glow. The floor was even and smooth, fashioned so in ancient times by dwarfish stoneworkers. We went in silence, walking slowly. Our breath was shortened by wonder.

Moving air laid a cool caress upon our skin; the smoke and flame of our torches were banners streaming out behind us.

"There must be further chambers within," Hinthan whispered. Awe hushed his voice. "Do you feel the air moving?"

"Aye."

"Come, then."

We went on, marveling at the vastness of the chambers as we passed from one to another. Each passageway was arched and vaulted, crafted with a beauty we could only partly see.

"Do you know anything about this place, Garroc?"

"Little enough, I suppose. If this is the place we seek, and it must be that it is, our legends have it that this was the vast storehouse of the treasure of the dwarfish kings. Though little riches besides crafted beauty do I see now."

Hinthan laughed, the sound of his mischievous humor rebounding from wall and ceiling. "Then you *did* hope to find chests of gold lying about for the taking!"

"Not I. Though I know that you must be disappointed, young one. Surely, you do not think those crafty kings would leave their wealth at the front gate?"

"No, I suppose not. No, of course not." Hinthan shivered and peered about him at the ancient beauty. "I confess that I do not like this place, Garroc. Its chill touches my heart."

"I do not expect that you do. You are a man of the sun and woods. Those are your natural grounds. I like the open places well enough, but here I feel strangely at home."

"Yet you have lived all your life in the open places."

"Aye. But these caves sing a song in my heart that I have not heard before. And even so, I love the song all the same."

"Do not abandon me, Garroc!" His voice was merry and light. He was certain now that great riches lay before us, and jesting came easily. "It seems that I must depend upon your love of this place to help find our way out to the light again."

"Aye, depend upon it, my friend. If only that I can return to this beauty."

I did not speak again. I had not the heart to spoil the timeless silence with the companionable banter which had lightened many another road. And more clearly now, the songs of ancient dwarves whispered in my heart.

Spires of crystal rose around us, supporting arches and vaults upon impossibly thin arms. Terraces descended into the distant bottom of the caverns. Smooth steps wound away to the left and right, taking paths which no foot had traveled in this age of the world.

I walked in a dream, following my friend. He was fretted by the quiet, for he was not wholly untouched by the wonder of the place. He would have spoken of it, but he respected my silence and led us farther inward and downward.

In chamber after chamber we found no treasure. Still we pressed on. Hinthan's hope was high. He was too young to lose his dreams quickly.

Even Hinthan, I think, recognized that there was something special about the little chamber, though he had no lore or legend to guide him. It was a place unworked, untouched by the hands of the craftsmen who had rendered the beauty of the outer caverns.

We stood upon its threshold and realized that this was the place from which the cool, fresh air flowed. Hinthan was perfectly still, as I had seen him many times before when prey was sighted. He drew a tight and silent breath. After a moment he spoke, but I paid no heed to his words. The ghostly voices of my far sires were singing more loudly now.

In words that I did not know, chants which touched not my mind but my heart, I heard their song. They told of the weary passage of years. They sang of ancient gods when they were wont to walk among mortals. Soon the words became clear.

*Come to the pool,  
Come to the place  
Where your long dead  
Fathers played at godhood.*

A great trembling took me. I tried not to hear that grim chant. "Hinthan," I whispered, but my throat was dry and words would hardly pass.

His hand upon my arm was taut with anticipation. "This must be the place, Garroc. We have seen nothing but dwarfish craft until now. Aye, aye," he said hastily as though answering an objection I might raise. "It may be that there is no treasure at all to be had. But see! This place is different from all the others. Older, it feels, and . . . different. I think there is no chamber beyond this one, Garroc. And yet it is from here that the fresher air comes. How strange." But he shook his head, dismissing the strangeness. He had no time for that consideration now. "If there is treasure to be found, Garroc, it must be here."

Between his words of hope and the dismal song heard only in my heart, I sifted through tattered fragments of fable for the name of this place. Drifting across the faded years, it came to me:

"Kunig Heim, they called it."

"What is the meaning of the name?"

"King's Home." Dread settled upon me like a dark cloak. I knew with a certainty I could not question that dooms had been meted out here.

"It seems a poor home for kings. This place is a grim hole when compared with the beauty of the outer chambers."

"I do not think they dwelt here, Hinthan. Still, this was one of their ancient places."

It needed no words to tell me that hope was rising in him again — if indeed it had ever waned.

"Hinthan, they sing a doomed song in this place. I like it not." My voice was edged with fear, and the echoes of that fear rustled around the little cave. Hinthan dropped his hand to the hilt of his sword, but there was nothing here against which a sword would prevail.

"What song, Garroc? I hear nothing."

"The voices, so old and burdened. Listen."

He did, catching his breath, but in the end he only shook his head. He eyed me sharply in the torch light. I did not care that he knew my fear. He had seen it before where it was warranted, and I his.

"You do not hear the voices?"

"No. What do they sing?"

"Dirges, and mourning. And . . ." I hesitated. Was it the voices, or was it my own dread which cautioned me against going on? He guessed my thought.

"They warn?"

"Aye, so it seems."

"I hear nothing, old friend. But — it may be that a guard here at the door would be a good thing."

Shame took me then. He offered a generous grace. Better that I had accepted it! But pride forbade that.

"No, let us go in."

Hinthan moved boldly forward, then, and I followed him, though my heart quailed. Together we had ventured into worse-seeming places than this. Still, it seemed to me that this fabled treasure was no longer worth the game.

The chamber widened after we entered. Its ceiling was far lower than the ones before. Rough stone walls glittered with moisture which dripped and sighed in little rills to the floor. In one place, a place lower than the floor and far toward the back, the water pooled. I could see it gleaming at the edge of the torch's light, dark and smooth.

The weary song which haunted me rose from the pool. Hinthan went on, but I turned toward the water. I could not ignore the song, and I could not gainsay the pull. Slowly, I went upon my knees at the water's edge. Its black surface did not reflect the light of my torch. Chill wonder touched my heart, overshadowing the dread which had till now gripped me.

"Do not fill your waterskin from that pool, Garroc." Hinthan's voice seemed farther away than it should have. I did not care.

"Garroc?"

"Aye?" I looked up and around, resisting for a moment the tug of the pool's song.

"The water is likely foul with standing. Do not fill your skin from that pool."

"No. I will not."

*Come to the place,  
Come to the pool,  
Come to the place where  
Mortals sought to move  
The hands of their gods.*

*Touch the water!  
Feel it cling to  
Hand and to skin.*

"Garroc! Look! See what's here!"

But all concerns had faded from my mind: I heard only the song of the pool. If Hinthan had discovered the dwarves' storied wealth, I could not find it in me to care. And I could not find room to wonder at my uncaring. I reached my hand down, and icy water lapped against my fingers.

"Garroc! The legends do not lie!" Still Hinthan's triumphant cry did not pierce the spell of the water's song.

*See the water clear.  
See the sights of*

*Ages yet to come.*

*See the wall darken  
And move with the  
Passing of  
Time yet unwon.*

I lifted my eyes then to the dark, rough wall of the cave. The shadows which my torch splashed across the cold stone were strange to me. They flowed and ran until they seemed to form a pattern. Pictures they formed, and the images had height and depth and breadth.

"Garroc!"

Hinthan's voice came to me as a whisper now: a memory from some distant time of light and sun. His hand upon my shoulder made no more impression than a shadow's touch.

"Look! Garroc, look!" His other hand overflowed with wealth. Rubies vied with emeralds for beauty, only to be eclipsed by the glittering flow of the gold chains which spilled through his fingers.

"Say farewell to Erich and his wars, Garroc! We will have small use for his gold now! Garroc! Come and look!"

So, I thought, *you have found your treasure, Hinthan, and dreams for the taking.* Dimly I was pleased. Because he was so close to me now, I could feel the joy and hope which surged in his young heart. Even the pull of the icy pool could not eclipse that completely.

I tried to answer, to let him know that I heard his words and saw his treasure. Distantly I thought that P'ajar would be pleased. Yet the pool would have me back.

*Time yet unwon . . .*

The whispered words filled my mind again, and again my eyes turned back to the wall and the shadowy play there. Time yet unwon. The future! I was not amazed, for as dread had fallen away, so did wonder. Like so much mist, my thought and will faded. I was in the shadow land between now and when.

"Garroc, what is it?" It could only have been instinct which tightened his grip on my shoulder. Neither of us could know then that there might be cause to fear.

People and places took form upon the wall. Villages rose at the feet of tall mountains; children played and grew, aging before my eyes. I could not move. I was ensorcelled.

Hardly did I feel Hinthan pulling at me, and I was only faintly aware that I was coming to my feet. I laughed then. Amazement returned, washing through me suddenly. The echoes carried my laughter around the chamber.

It was as though Hinthan's frightened question released a knowledge in me that had rested in my heart, unknown till now.

"A Pool of Farseeing!" I cried. Bits of legend and tales whirled through my mind and joined to form sure knowledge.

"Garroc, what?"

"See! Look at the shadows!" I pulled away from him and went back down beside the water. Time's scope was narrowing. I thought that I saw places which were familiar to me in the images. Was that Rilling? And the inn? Aye, so it was!

"Garroc! What do you see?"

I did not answer. It may be that he has forgiven me for what I did then. I have not forgiven myself. Snatching his hand — aye! that same hand that will yet clasp mine in friendship — I thrust it into the pool. The dark water swallowed it to the wrist. I heard him gasp.

"Now, see! Look!" I cried.

From his other hand the rainbowed wealth of legend fell to the cavern's floor. Neither of us noticed. Hinthan turned to the wall. Widening in sudden understanding, his eyes darted here and there as they sought to follow the span of an unborn time.

"Do you see?" I would give him a greater treasure than gold: I would give him his future.

"Aye," he whispered. I do not know that it was my question he answered. It sounded more as though he acknowledged something else.

I watched my friend's face, for it seemed to me that I could see the march of the future better in his eyes than upon the shadow-dancing wall. Delight was there, and then amazement. His eyes lighted with the flame of knowledge unhopd for. Awe cast strange shadows across his face.

And then something else came slowly, as the thought of a waking man. Wonder and joy were driven out by something darker. His grey eyes blazed with terror, his jaw sagged.

"Hinthan?"

He struggled then, in the grip of some horrible thing. All my fear came back, and it was redoubled, howling in my heart.

Then suddenly, dashed away by the clawed fangs of horror, all familiarity was gone from his face, and I hardly knew him. He threw back his head and screamed. The sound of that abandoned cry echoed in the chamber of Kunig Heim and found its answer in my own soul.

I grabbed for him, pulled him to me with all my strength. Calling his name again and again, I sought to wrench him from the pool's spell. But this was not Hinthan, not my old friend and young son. This was a creature possessed by horror, and I could not reach him.

I tore my eyes from his face and sought the wall and the shadow dance. Divided, I both feared to see and yet needed to know the thing Hinthan saw there. My hands fell away from him. The blood in my veins froze to ice. It

was Hinthan's form I saw there, changed but still known to me.

A dark dagger in his shadow's hand lifted, soaring high as his arm would reach. His head was thrown back, much as it was even now, but no scream issued from the silent play upon the wall. Then with terrible suddenness the dagger swooped down, biting deep into his shadow flesh, drinking long of the blood flowing from the ghostly wound.

"My death!" he screamed, and I thought that his throat would bleed with the violence of the cry. "*My death!*"

I leaped for him and caught him as he fell, senseless, to the stone floor.

Long it was before he came to himself, and long I wept in the silence of Kunig Heim. The voices of my far sires were stilled. At their bidding I had tasted of their ancient folly. Were that not sin enough, I had forced it upon my friend. In the stony silence they listened to the weeping of one of their small sons.

We did not bring that cursed treasure out of Kunig Heim. If P'ajar doubted my word that there was no treasure to be had, he did not let on to me. There must have been questions in that canny old mind. But if there were questions, perhaps he had found answers of a kind as well, for he did not press me. And beyond one question, which I would not answer, he had the grace not to remark on Hinthan's slide into drunkenness. He knew that we had found something in Kunig Heim. I think that he feared to know what it was.

And there is, from time to time, something of the familiar Hinthan to be seen in my friend. At rare moments he will attempt a lopsided grin which is a fair imitation of his old smile. But the impudent lad is gone from his eyes and comes no more. Torment lives there now, and there is only a shred of that crooked grin left among the horror and pain.

It is that lopsided smile that I cherish. For while he is still capable of it, he will live. But fate has made Hinthan the tool of his own destruction. The shadow of knowledge must overpower him someday, and that crooked grin will go down before it. In the eternal night of a despair he can no longer fight, his hand will rise to accomplish the death he knows must come.

We do not speak of what lies between us and before him. I think that we never will. He tries, when he can, to put it away from him. He tries, when he has the strength, to remember that there is still life until his own hand must complete the death which began in Kunig Heim. These valiant efforts grieve me more than his descents into wine-drenched forgetfulness.

Circled about by a fate he cannot deny, hedged and fenced by knowledge he cannot lose, Hinthan sleeps with his own ghost. It is a cold and grim specter, no more solid than a shadow's dark image upon a wall. But for all that, it is real.

And I sleep no better than he. For after that ghost has grown strong enough to guide Hinthan's hand to the dagger, it will not flee these mortal

lands. I need no Pool of Farseeing to know that it will come to walk beside me.



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## IN THE EYES OF THE PILOT

The breath of many worlds  
sifting through her blood,  
a wealth of alien images  
overflowing the faceted orbs  
of her mind's projection,  
she shapes unlikely geometries  
of spatial condensation  
and leaps unerringly  
on the template of the stars.

Here she is alone in the dark  
and stretched very thin,  
four thousand tons of steel  
and flesh trailing behind,  
patterned and at one  
with the universal birth  
of stellar excitation.

Here the Doppler fractions,  
and each line of thought  
which clicks smoothly  
in the breach of acceleration,  
instantly threads  
the shifting parameters  
of force and inclination.

Always the light returns  
like a relentless assassin,  
the attenuated atoms assemble  
and she unclips the sensors  
to breathe again: her thought  
once more is only thought,  
her eyes, blue cognizance  
fixed in transient space,  
reflect her destination.

— Bruce Boston

# ETCHINGS OF HER MEMORIES

by Richard A. Lupoff





Art: Stephen E. Fabian

Pp'p peered around the edge of the rock to see if she was safe. There was no immediate sign of danger, and ripples of coloration swept from her mantle to the tips of her tentacles. She flattened herself and grew nearly transparent before creeping onto the white, sandy sea bottom.

She drew back, bracing herself against a couple of smaller rocks, and peered upward at the sun. It was bright and clear, and the warm currents of brine made the sun's rays dance across the sand. Pp'p ran a heavy rush of brine through her gills, tasting the fresh, relaxing flavor of the water.

Life was good.

She crept along on the sand, wary lest a predator should catch her unaware. There was a bed of tall sea grass where she knew a tribe of fierce morays lived, balancing on their tails and swaying with the reedlike sea grass. She admired and envied the eels their limitless patience, but her active mind demanded frequent stimulation, nor was she of so self-contained a nature that she could occupy herself with abstract ruminations while lying in wait for prey.

Pp'p normally stayed fairly close to her home, working in her cave, building the elaborate rock sculptures that provided her with endless food for thought. She would work out a geometrical configuration in her mind, then arrange a pattern of pebbles to represent the concept, then circle it, studying it from every conceivable angle, analyzing all the dimensional implications of the shapes she had constructed.

When she had finished such a study, usually she would break it up and restock the pebbles in an elaborate storage system where they were sorted by size, color, shape, and texture. A few of the patterns had proven especially intriguing, and the possible analyses of these had not been exhausted. Pp'p had copied these carefully onto the walls of her cave, holding in her tentacles mollusc shells sharpened to fine points. She could scratch with these shells, and because they were actually softer than the cave wall, their points would be slowly worn away, leaving traces of the chalky stuff on the rock.

Pp'p was proud of her invention. It was a way of preserving a pattern of things without having to save the things themselves. She had three separate patterns traced out on the wall of her cave, and although the pebbles had been scattered back to stock, Pp'p could look at the pattern scratched on the wall with mollusc shell and see it just as if the rocks were still laid out on the cave floor.

Today, however, she had left the vicinity of her cave.

When she reached the edge of the bed of sea grass, she gathered her tentacles and launched herself into the brine, jetting herself forward with her siphon, steering herself with her tentacles, and floating above the waving sea grass, her eyes fixed on the bed of grass, her tentacles stretched out behind her.

There was a gentle current, and the grass waved gracefully in it, first this way and then that.

Scattered among the reedlike blades of grass Pp'p could see the waiting morays. They were almost exactly the same color as the grass. Each blade of grass was a dark green, fading to a paler shade at its edges, and had a yellowish stripe running up the middle. The eels were the same width as the grass, and despite their long backbones, they were able to balance on their tails, their bodies being of similar buoyancy to the brine.

Unthinkingly, they matched their swaying to that of the grass.

Pp'p saw an unwary half-grown bass cruising near the edge of the sea grass. It headed toward the grass, and Pp'p felt an impulse to warn the poor creature away, to let it know the peril it ran if it continued across the top of the grass. But she knew that it could not understand her: the fish simply lacked the mentality to comprehend.

She could try to frighten it off or even lay down an ink screen to hide it from the morays. But the morays, too, needed to live. It was not their nature to forage for dinner, but to lie in wait for dinner to come to them.

Was it ethically preferable to save the bass and starve the eels? Pp'p was troubled. Or to permit the poor bass to come to its end?

So absorbed was Pp'p in her moral rumination that she permitted her own wariness to lapse. She was safe from the eels beneath her, but she failed to keep an eye out for the menace from above.

All she knew was that she had suddenly missed the warmth and light of direct sun rays. She whirled, rotating on her longitudinal axis, barely in time to see the manta ray dropping toward her, wings propelling it downward furiously.

Pp'p acted reflexively, not stopping to consider her course of movement. She thrust herself downward even as the manta's barbed and poisonous tail arced toward her. Simultaneously, she jetted ink behind her, using the skill that her people had developed uncounted generations before, to the salvation of uncounted individuals.

She plunged into the sea grass, forgetful of the peril that waited there.

The manta, confused by the ink cloud, plunged and thrashed, whipping its murderous tail at the grass.

Pp'p scuttled across the sea bottom, scrambling frantically among the bases of the shafts of grass.

A huge moray, sensing her presence, curled downward. The eels were accustomed to reaching up for their meals, but they were supple enough to arch themselves and plunge at prey scuttling on the sand as well. Terrorized, Pp'p cringed, flattened and pale, offering up her soul, waiting for the clash of the moray's rows of razor-sharp triangular teeth.

So suddenly did the moray topple away that Pp'p failed to comprehend what had happened until she saw its blood gush out of the slashed ends of its body and rise cloudlike through the brine. The last of Pp'p's ink and the fresh blood of the moray mixed into a grim mist.

The manta settled to feed on the fresh flesh of the decapitated eel. Pp'p

scuttled aside, staying away from the gorging manta. As the great ray dropped almost to the sea bottom and began feasting on the moray, Pp'p moved farther away. But a new thrashing began behind her.

The other morays in the vicinity, possibly drawn by their brother's fresh blood, became aware of the presence of the manta ray. There was a wavering among the sea grass as morays abandoned their positions and hastened toward the manta.

Simultaneously, a dozen morays seized the ray and gouged great chunks of substance from its fleshy back and wings. The manta pounded the sea floor with its wing tips, hurling itself upward. But the morays clung to it, their weight dragging it back down to the sea bed.

The manta thrashed its tail. Morays tore loose from the ray and were flung in all directions. Now the blood of the great ray mingled with that of eels that fell victim to its thrashing, muscular tail.

Sickened, Pp'p thrust herself out of the sea grass, rising as rapidly as she was able. The water here was shallow, and Pp'p ascended nearly to the surface.

Here, she could see the shiny roof of the sea and the brilliant ball of sun high above. This was the highest she had ever risen; only once before had she swum near the surface, when a male, T'ptt, had invited her there. He had been a true friend, and they had exchanged ideas regarding the origins of the sea and the nature of being.

They had remained friends a long time. Then T'ptt had grown pale, losing the coloring from the tips of his tentacles at first, then soon from more and more of himself. And he had grown flaccid and weak.

And then he had died.

He was the first true friend that Pp'p had ever had — in fact, the only one. And he had died. That had made her wonder what death truly was: a simple and total cessation of awareness, or something else. And that had made her wonder about other matters: what life truly was, how the world had come to be, all the species that dwelt in it, where they had come from, and where they went when they died. And whether the world would die in time, and if so, where *it* would go.

She curled the tips of her tentacles in perplexity, and bands of color rippled across her skin.

She knew that thousands of eggs were formed for every one that hatched successfully within its mother's mantle, and that hundreds of hatchlings were born into the sea for every one that survived to adulthood.

What became of the rest? Did the hatchling in a destroyed egg have a soul? Did one that was devoured almost at the moment of its emergence?

She flexed her tentacles.

She would have one more meal, and then perhaps she would learn the answers to some of the questions that had vexed her for all the time she could remember. She longed to be with T'ptt again. If he had had no more an-

swers than she, he had at least shared in the contemplations of the mysteries.

She was well clear of the sea grass by now. Schools of fishes darted beneath her. Sometimes she envied them, envied creatures who did not have the awareness that her kind had.

At least she thought they did not. There was no certain way of knowing whether a fish was aware, was truly conscious, as her kind was.

From time to time, fish seemed to be aware of themselves and of their nature. Did they think? Did they communicate? The fish of a school could sometimes react with amazing precision to danger or to the presence of food. Pp'p curled her tentacles, then straightened them again as if casting the thought from herself.

There was no way to know, and fruitless speculation was a waste of time.

Still, she missed T'ptt. She could have discussed this with him. She missed the exchange of thoughts, of feelings, and of ideas. Even to know that another wondered about the same things she wondered about had been a comfort.

What was the consciousness of a moray eel? What went on in those narrow heads? What thoughts moved behind those blandly cruel, infinitely patient eyes?

Pp'p wished she could ask T'ptt what he thought.

If only she could ask him!

She thrust herself forward, revolving along her longitudinal axis so that sunlight and sea bottom alternated in her view. She decided that she had better find some food for herself. She flashed toward the sandy bottom again and searched among rocks for crustaceans. Attached to a large rock she found a mollusc of a type she had tasted before. She knew that the meat of this type was sweet on her raspy tongue. The crustaceans she usually preferred were in sparse supply this season, but bivalves were plentiful.

She lifted the mollusc in the tips of two tentacles. The tentacles were immensely powerful, and the suction cups which lined each in rows were capable of exerting great force. But the mollusc, itself a remote cousin of Pp'p's kind, was equipped with a single, massive muscle that it used to hold its thick shells closed against all enemies.

Pp'p lifted the bivalve with care. She held it before her eyes, manipulated its halves with the sensitive tips of her tentacles. She was unable to budge it.

When she had opened these things in the past, she had done so by smashing them against rocks. That brought her a good meal, but the fragments of smashed shell were ground into the meat and could grind painfully in her beak. There had to be a better way to do this.

She had found empty bivalve shells that she knew had been opened by echinoderms. These, too, were almost totally mindless creatures — the world was a lonely place for the intelligent. Yet by watching the starfish in action, Pp'p had learned their technique for opening the bivalves and had realized that the long, slow pressure of the echinoderm's sucking disks, al-

though similar in kind to her own, used a principle of reversed pressure that she could not duplicate.

At last Pp'p had an idea.

She fixed a sucker to each half of the mollusc's shell and exerted pressure on it — not pulling the halves apart now, but rotating them in opposite directions. For a time the mollusc resisted. Then in infinite slowness, the two halves began to yield. Pp'p continued the pressure, and slowly, slowly, the mollusc weakened. The upper half of its shell moved one way; the lower, the opposite.

Then, as if the creature had surrendered to its inevitable fate, all resistance ended: the shells separated!

Pp'p scooped the pink, rich meat out of the shell with one tentacle and conveyed it beneath the edge of her mantle. Her beak chopped it into pieces, then ground it into bits. It was delicious.

When she had finished her meal, she looked at the halves of the mollusc's shell. Each was oblong, white, of a rough texture on the outside and of a glistening, silky smoothness on the inside. The mollusc had had a comfortable home for itself.

Pp'p felt a momentary twinge of remorse. The mollusc had been an inoffensive living thing. She had ended its existence because she was hungry. But there was nothing she could do: life survived by devouring other life. It was a fact, and there was no way that Pp'p could alter it.

She hefted the mollusc's now-vacant shells in her tentacles. She studied them, thinking.

Holding the shells carefully, she crept back toward her cave, moving off-balance on six of her eight tentacles.

When she got there, she crept inside and laid the shells carefully near the back of her cave. Then she returned to the entrance, scuttling along on all her tentacles. She lifted one rock after another, working from a pile that she kept near the opening for this purpose.

She filled the entrance to the cave with rocks, then retreated once more.

Little light penetrated the rock barrier Pp'p had built. She allowed her tentacles to slide out like the arms of a starfish. She lay her head against the wall of her cave.

Carefully, she lifted the two halves of the mollusc's shell and held them before her eyes. In the near-darkness of the cave her irises had expanded, allowing the maximum of light into her eyes. She studied the two halves of the shell until she was satisfied, then laid one down and lifted a rock. Using the rock as a tool, she chipped away at the mollusc shell until it was narrowed and pointed, a good instrument for making marks on the wall of her cave, like the marks she sometimes made to help her remember patterns of rocks.

She lifted herself on her tentacles, raising her head and staring at the wall of her cave.

She shifted her gaze to the sharpened shell, the marking shell that she had



made, then back to the wall. She closed her irises and reopened them repeatedly.

Finally, tentatively, she reached with the sharpened shell to the wall and scraped it in a curving line.

She dropped the shell and crouched on her tentacles, studying what she had done. Water coursed through her gills. She flexed the tips of her tentacles in perplexity and even clacked her beak, something that she did only in times of profound agitation. Colors rippled across her skin, as she expanded and contracted chromatophores.

She leaned her head against the wall, bringing her eyes close to the mark she had made.

She picked up the sharpened shell again and made another mark, then another, and another.

T'ptt, she gestured.

T'ptt!

But T'ptt did not move. He was there, yet he was not there.

Pp'p stared at T'ptt. She had scratched at the wall of her cave with the sharpened mollusc shell, scratched with a wild energy. She had been in a frenzy. There had been a thought in her mind, something so marvelous and alive that she could neither contain nor even stop to contemplate it.

She had had to act.

Now T'ptt was on the wall of her cave, just as the images she had made of the patterns of rocks.

Pp'p thought on all of this.

She had made patterns of rocks on the floor of her cave, then had made marks on the wall to help her remember the patterns of rocks. Then she had put the rocks away, but the patterns had remained. She was able to look at these patterns, as if they were the rocks themselves, and know what the rocks had looked like, what they had represented to her.

What was different about what she had done just now?

She had known T'ptt. They had swum together, explored their world together. When Pp'p had formed her clutch of eggs, it was T'ptt whose hectocotylus had placed the sperm packet within her mantle. How frightening had been his probing beneath her mantle! How strange the sensation of his movement within her tenderness!

Still another new thought assaulted Pp'p. She felt her tentacles writhing in agitation. She shut down her irises to hold out the ideas, but they came all the more rapidly, all the more strongly.

She knew that many of her eggs had hatched successfully, that many of her hatchlings had survived. But now — were they fully grown? Were they nearby, or had they swum to distant parts of the world to find caves for themselves?

Pp'p's people were not social: they lived solitary lives and gave little thought to matters beyond their dens, their meals, and their flights from

their enemies.

Pp'p's companionship with T'ptt had itself been a rare occurrence among their people. After mating, the males died. The females fared better, but only little. They carried their fertilized eggs until the young hatched within their mothers' mantles, then soon after the young were freed into their pelagic realm, the mothers, too, normally failed.

Why Pp'p had recovered her strength after bearing her young she had no idea. It was something strange. The world did not always continue to work exactly as it had worked before.

Now she thought again of her hatchlings. Could she find any of them? If so, could she know them in some way? Could they know her as the one from whose mantle they had emerged?

If only T'ptt were here for Pp'p to share this thought with! And that thought brought Pp'p back to the marking on the wall, the marking that was T'ptt.

It was possible to mark not merely such patterns as her markings of the rocks, but also patterns of other things. A pattern of T'ptt, of one of her own kind. Could she mark a pattern of another kind of creature? Of a bass or an eel? Could she make a prawn or a crab?

Could she make patterns of — she closed her irises and in the darkness tried to see images in her mind — of more than one creature? Could she make patterns of a manta ray and an eel together? And could she make them do things? She remembered the manta slashing at the eel, chopping it in two with its powerful tail. She remembered the manta greedily, unwarily dropping to the sea grass to feed on the dead moray. And she remembered the other eels in turn attacking the manta, tearing its flesh and devouring it in gobbets.

She studied the piece of mollusc shell and the wall of her cave. She needed more light.

She scuttled to the entrance of her cave, removed some of the rocks that she had placed there for protection, and returned to her place by the wall. She could see the scene now in her mind: the waving sea grass and the flat, winged manta ray and the gluttonous eels. The blood, mixing with the brine, turning pale and cloudy.

There was enough light now in Pp'p's cave to permit her to see the wall clearly. There was a small chance that some marauding creature might attack her through the opening she had left: some hammerhead or even a barracuda with its sleek speed and menacing grace. But Pp'p was rapt in her work, and so she could not divert attention to the task of guarding her home.

There was the sea grass. There! There! She made each stroke with her piece of sharpened mollusc shell. And there, the manta huge and flat.

She drew back. The manta lay flat on the sea grass — Pp'p could see it in her mind. But the wall went only *up*, and the manta extended *away*. How could she make her mark like that? She pushed harder against the wall, try-

ing to make the pattern of the manta go *away*, not *up*. But nothing happened until she pressed so hard that she could feel the tip of the mollusc shell crumble.

She held it before her eyes. Her tentacles flexed. She stared at the now-blunted shell.

She had failed.

Before she could attempt another solution to the problem, her cave grew dark.

Through the entranceway came a deadly hammerhead, its wide-spread eyes huge, its rows of deadly teeth exposed in a wide-mouthed readiness, prepared to tear at Pp'p, to rip away her tough skin and devour the soft flesh within.

Pp'p had no weapon with which to give battle.

Her tentacles with their suckers were useful for grasping and holding a meal, but they could do little against this formidable enemy. Her beak was strong and sharp, but to bring it into play she would have to invert her whole body, virtually blinding herself and exposing her tenderest underparts to the hammerhead's ferocious attack. She could set up a cloud of ink, but in the small confines of her cave there was no way she could hope to escape past the hammerhead.

T'ptt! If she could talk with him, think out this problem. . . .

Her time was short.

She held the mollusc shell before her, between herself and the hammerhead. The hammerhead drifted, tail waving slowly to help it maintain its posture.

Pp'p shot to one side, colliding with the wall of her cave.

The hammerhead slashed forward at her, passing the tentacle that held the molusc shell.

Pp'p plunged it at the hammerhead. She felt it impact on the creature's eyeball. For a moment there was resistance, then, even though the shell had been blunted, it penetrated the membrane covering the eyeball and plunged into the monster's head.

The hammerhead thrashed frantically, snapping its jaws in futile efforts to destroy Pp'p. Using all of her strength, Pp'p shoved the mollusc shell into the hammerhead's brain. The monster gave a final convulsive shudder and drifted slowly to the floor of Pp'p's cave.

She backed away from it, uncertain that it was fully dead. She waited until she was sure that no life remained in the thing, then crept forward shuddering.

She lifted the hammerhead from the floor. Although Pp'p was strong, it took all her efforts to lift the dead hammerhead and heft it to the half-blocked opening of the cave. She was able to shove it across the rampart of stones. Then she scuttled over the rampart herself. She did not want to leave the dead creature near her home.

There was a risk even now that its blood would draw another dangerous predator, but there was little bleeding, and Pp'p moved as quickly as she could.

She tugged the dead thing behind her, creeping away from her cave, past a row of low hills to a ravine she had passed on other days. She hefted the hammerhead over the ravine and gave it a shove, watching it drift slowly into the darkness. Before the hammerhead disappeared, there was a thrashing. Pp'p did not know what lived in the bottom of the ravine. Whatever it was, it would have a fine meal, free of effort or risk.

She pumped water through her gills, refreshing and cleansing herself of the presence of the predator.

Slowly, she crept back toward her cave. The moray eels had eaten the manta that had first attempted to eat them — or had it been after Pp'p? Her own recollection of the incident had been made murky by the ensuing events.

Pp'p had eaten the mollusc, and the shark had wanted to eat Pp'p. But instead, the shark was now being devoured by . . . by whatever it was that lurked in the bottom of the ravine.

Was there meaning to any of it? Had any creature a claim on life greater than any other creature's? T'ptt could have helped her to think it through, but T'ptt was dead. Even the image of T'ptt that she had made in her cave, she knew, could not help her. Nothing could help her.

Then existence was only a matter of fleeing from those stronger and fiercer than oneself and of pursuing those smaller and weaker than oneself.


That was all!

Pp'p flexed her tentacles. That could not be all. It must not be all!

She would find her hatchlings, then find a way to share her thoughts with them! She would show them how to make marking things out of sharpened shells of molluscs. She would also show them how to make patterns of stones, and help them to think about the patterns that they made, and think about all that existed and all that lived.

What they could learn, what they could do, she had no idea. She could only find them and try.

Together, they could do — what?

Together, although Pp'p did not know it, they could found a civilization. 

## THE LITERARY CAREER OF RICHARD A. LUPOFF: Current Directions . . .

People keep asking me, "How did you happen to become a science-fiction writer?" in rather the same tone traditionally used to ask, "What's a nice girl like you doing, working in a place like this?"

The fact is, it would have been more remarkable if I'd become anything *except* a science-fiction writer. The earliest reading matter I can remember was science fiction (or fantasy) — *The Teenie Weenies* by William Donahey, *Maximo the Amazing Superman* by R. R. Winterbotham, and any number of wonderful anthologies published in the 1940s.

My teen years coincided with the last great flowering of new science-fiction magazines — *Other Worlds*, *F&SF*, *Galaxy*, *Fantastic*, and others. I lived from issue to issue. My heroes were the writers and editors who made those magazines — Ray Palmer, Bea Mahaffey, Howard Browne, Tony Boucher, Mick McComas, and, above all, Horace Gold.

Those were wonderful days for science fiction — or perhaps I should say, those were wonderful days to be 15 years old and a science-fiction fan! There seemed to be no end to the irresistible yarns coming from Frederik Pohl, C. M. Kornbluth, Judy Merrill, Damon Knight, James Blish, Robert A. Heinlein, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, Clifford Simak, Jack Vance, Edmond Hamilton, Leigh Brackett, Jack Williamson. . . .

And just as a youthful sports enthusiast or a music-lover, for example, might hope to become an athlete or a musician in later years, I found it the most natural thing in the world to start writing science fiction.

Right now, I'm working on two major projects while preparing to take on another — and if you think that's a lot of dinner plates to juggle, you're absolutely correct! One of these projects is a series of books taking place on an alternate time-track where both the history and the geography of the earth differ from our own.

Real-world heroes and villains get to zoom through breathtaking imaginary adventures in these books — Charles Lindbergh, Amelia Earhart, and Manfred von Richthofen starred in a round-the-world air race in the first book, *Circumpolar!* The second in the series, *Countersolar!*, is an interplanetary tale which features Albert Einstein, Juan Peron, and Eva Duarte. The third book in the series, as now planned, will be *Transtemporal!*

I've been alternating these books with a much more serious space adventure series — *Sun's End* (1984), *Galaxy's End* (1987), and *Time's End*, which I've got to write next. The story in this issue of *Amazing Stories*, "Etchings of Her Memories," will appear as one chapter of *Galaxy's End*.

The story originated in a question: what species currently living on earth is a good candidate for the development of intelligence and civilization? From a science-fictional point of view, I wanted to avoid mammals (too much like humans) and insects and arachnids (too different from humans). Out of a list of candidates I made the same choice that Ray Gallun did in his classic story "Old Faithful" half a century ago — the octopus!

I did a little research into these fascinating creatures and learned that there is good reason to expect them to be intelligent. They have wonderfully developed brains and nervous systems, sensitive and complex organs of manipulation, binocular vision . . . and in both observed (spontaneous) behav-

ior and laboratory experiments they show a remarkable ability to solve problems and to learn.

Why, then, don't they have a civilization? Alas — they are congenitally shy and asocial creatures. Furthermore, they have a short life span under the best of conditions, and the males invariably die after mating; the females, after spawning.

If only their life span could be extended — and if they would socialize with one another . . .

I mentioned a third major project. That will be a very long narrative tentatively called *Born of the Stars*. I don't know yet whether it will be written as a single huge volume or divided into several conventional-sized books in the fashion of the *Ends* series, which are also, really, a single huge novel.

In between books I like to work on "little" projects — short stories, bits of criticism, or taped interviews for broadcast on the weekly radio show I've been doing for the past ten years. I also hope to resurrect dear old Ova Hamlet, the alter ego under which I wrote a series of literary parodies for *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic* some years ago. They were great fun, and Ova has been stirring audibly of late!

### . . . and Past Achievements

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*The Digital Wristwatch of Philip K. Dick*. Canyon Press, 1985.

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## Kleinism

Nothing is more expensive than precision. And nothing is more wasteful than precision where you don't need it.

— Professor Arthur L. Klein (1898-1983)



# Exhibit

## Stephen E. Fabian

In 1974, after having worked for twenty years as an electronics laboratory technician and as an engineering associate, Stephen E. Fabian decided to change careers: he became a science-fiction illustrator. Stephen has always been attracted to the science-fiction genre because of the sense of wonder the field creates. "SF is such an awesome mind-opening experience," he

tells us. "It deals with every stratum of human and non-human activity in the past, present, and future. The real and the unreal, the probable and the wildly imaginary improbable. . . . In its very foundation, I believe that the better SF writers have a deep love of mankind and a genuine respect for the dignity of all life. They care, and they have made me care. They have made SF an important genre, and at its best, SF is the highest form of art."

To create his riveting color pieces, Stephen uses acrylic paint because it thins and cleans with water and it can be applied like oil paint, water color, or thick 3-D impasto. Acrylic dries



"M-M-Magic," 1981





**"The Charmers"**

Stephen E. Fabian

quickly, and so changes requested by an editor are easy to make.

As for his black-and-white artwork, Stephen makes use either of the coquille board with ink and a black color pencil or of a smooth vellum art paper with ink and various shades of gray color pencils. The coquille board offers a grainy, stipple effect, whereas the vellum provides a continuous-tone photographic look.

Because of the professional look and quality of his works, Stephen has been nominated seven times for a Hugo Award in the Best Professional Artist category, and he has received the British Fantasy Award for his artwork on three occasions. Twice, he has been honored by the Small Press Writers & Artists Organization.

His artwork has graced the covers and pages of *Amazing® Stories*, *Fantastic™ Stories*, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, *Galaxy*, *Galileo*, and *Fantasy Book*. He has also prepared color covers and interior illustrations for numerous publishing houses.

Those who are interested in private commissions or purchases, or in finding out more about Stephen's artwork, can contact him at his studio. Write to: Stephen E. Fabian, 4 Sussex Road, Wayne NJ 07470



**"Stranded"**



**"Mermaid"**

**"Dragon of the Ishtar Gate," 1985**



# WHEN THE HALOPERIDOL RUNS OUT AND THE BLUE FAIRY NEVER COMES

by Shirley Weinland

art: Val Lakey Lindahn

*Shirley Weinland trained in creative writing, but she has spent a large part of her lifetime doing technical editing and writing for a California research institute. In recent years, she has taken to following her daughter and son-in-law to science-fiction conventions, where she loves listening to the SF authors, but pretends to be invisible for fear of being taken for an imposter.*

*This is her first SF sale in the U.S. And she claims she is having difficulty maintaining a properly professional demeanor at work — she keeps wanting to whistle.*

Seven of us in chains climb out of the helicopter, four men and three women, and look around to see if it matters where we are. They haven't told us anything. Of course, why should they? We're supposed to be crazy.

From the helicopter door, the guard throws a key ring as far as he can down the road. We scramble after it, and the helicopter takes off. Don gets the key ring, takes his own chains off, then dances around, making fun of the rest of us. All he does with me is call me "Moldy Maggie," but he gets too close to Maria, and she whacks him with her chain.

Green silence flows in around us as the chopper noise goes away. Don pretends to unlock Wally to tease him, but Wally is too smart for him. He stumbles and tumbles and gets the ring of keys away, unlocking himself and tossing the keys toward the rest of us while he leads Don to the tavern. Johnny unlocks us.

The other buildings are a mill at the top of the street, about a dozen houses, a warehouse, a church, and a little store. The graveyard is opposite the church, and there is a long mound at one end. The buildings are deserted, but the people have left all their possessions, and none of the doors are bolted. The country is not ours; everything — the labels in the store, the folded newspaper on the table in the warehouse office, the books on the shelves — is in a language none of us can read.

Don and Wally catch up with us just before we get to the church. Don is swigging wine defiantly, even though none of us have yet seen anybody to defy.

"There's nobody here," Susan says.

Don pretends he knows all about it. "They're buried over there, all of



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them.” He points to the mound. “They died in the epidemic.”

Yesterday, in the plane, he tried to scare us the same way, saying how everybody else at the hospital had died, and billions everywhere else. I didn’t believe him then, either.

He doesn’t like it when people don’t believe him. “You’ve been drugged stupid so long you don’t know anything,” he tells me. “They got tired of taking care of us, so they dumped us in somebody else’s plague village.”

Maria dashes over to the horse trough in front of the church and starts scrubbing at her hands to get the germs off. Don points at her and laughs, and she lunges at him, but Johnny picks her up, just like that, and stands there holding her. She looks startled, but she doesn’t try to hurt him.

The rest of us go on to the end of the village, looking in at all the doors. When we come back, Johnny and Maria are sitting together on the steps of the little store, eating candy. We still haven’t found anybody to tell us what we’re supposed to do.

Ed wants to get as far away as possible, in case the guard comes back for us, but that’s really crazy — the guard was glad to be rid of us. Anyway, where would we go? To the dark, distant mountains, maybe, to find people who would kill us not because we’re crazy, but because we’re strangers.

Susan says, “There’s plenty to eat here. Why don’t we have supper?”

“We’ll have a real orgy — we’ll eat naked in the church,” Don says.

“You can’t. I won’t let you.” Maria tells him. “I’m Catholic.”

Don says it isn’t a Catholic church, but Johnny tells him to forget it. Johnny’s big enough that Don doesn’t dare to do anything; he just sulks elaborately.

I want silence. I go back to the house next to the tavern, and when Susan calls after me to ask if I’m coming back, I don’t answer.

The house has three rooms upstairs and two down, and none of them is a bathroom. It takes me a while to find in my mind the word my grandmother used for the structure out back. “Privy,” she said, telling me about when she was little.

The house still has a faint smell of laundry soap and liniment. I open the cupboard in the big room and find pictures pinned to the inside of the cupboard door: a holy picture, a snapshot of two girls with short, wavy hair and 1940s rayon dresses, and a postcard of the Empire State Building postmarked 1947. I can’t read the address, let alone the message.

This seems to be the house of an orderly, strict old woman. She won’t want me any more than my grandmother did. But this time, there’s no welfare lady to turn me over to.

I open one chest in the parlor and find table linens and aprons. The other chest has clothes in it. I pull out a black skirt that has bands of color worked around the bottom, and a white blouse that has red and blue flowers and green leaves embroidered all over the top, and I leave them hanging over the side of the open chest for her to find when she comes back.

I don't believe they're dead. People say that to make you feel sorry. "She died last night," they tell you, waiting to see what you'll do.

The kitchen has a trapdoor. I pull it up and go down the ladder. Shelves of jars line the little cellar — jam, sliced peaches, whole plums, cherries. There are crocks of pickles, a barrel of flour, a crock of dry beans. I think of pulling things off the shelves and smashing them, but I don't do it. I climb back up the ladder and bang down the trapdoor. It makes so much noise that Wally looks out from the tavern next door. I wave to him.

The silence, the plenty, and the order weigh me down. I want to pull down the sausages, braids of onions, braids of garlicks, strings of peppers that hang from the kitchen rafters, saved for somebody else. In some old movie, a boy from the city climbed back on the bus loaded with food to take home, and his grandmother waved, weeping because she'd never see him again. She had a shawl over her white hair. I look around to explain that it's not our doing, but there's no one to tell.

There is less blame outside. Plants have already pushed up out of place, and last fall's unpicked vegetables that went to seed have sprouted again. Violets and lilies of the valley bloom along the shady side of the house. I have never smelled them before. Also, they're not stiff like the plastic ones.

But if the straggling of the garden is a comfort, all that growth makes the silence worse. There are plants all over, but there is no bird, no dog, no chicken, not even a buzzing fly to keep the silence from smothering my ears. I suppose Don will tell us the animals died, too.

A shutter bangs and I jump. Susan leans out the tavern window. "Hey," she calls, "come over and have some wine."

And I hurry over to take my place among them. They sit at tavern tables, conversing like ladies and gentlemen.

"We think we'll stay here," Maria tells me grandly.

It's a dumb thing to say — where would we go? — but it makes me feel better all the same. For now, it doesn't even matter that I don't like them.

Don comes in wearing the priest's vestments, carrying a bell, incense, and a holy picture so encrusted with gold and silver all you can see is the face. He leaps around us, chanting nonsense, ringing the bell, and waving the incense about. He puts the picture on the counter, leaning it against the cash box, and bows to it, mocking.

Nobody stops him, so he sits down, still looking at the picture, at the big dark eyes — Byzantine eyes. He takes off the stole he's wearing and throws it at the picture to cover the eyes, but all he does is knock the picture off the back of the counter. Maria darts over to pick it up, but Don pretends not to notice.

We eat crackers and jam and canned ham for supper — no vegetables. Who cares? I go home in the moonlight and light the lamp. I see the clothes and know I have mistreated them, but I harden my heart and go on upstairs. Only I remind me of Don, so I go back down, fold them carefully so as not to

hurt all that work, and put them away.

From the upstairs window, the tavern is the only other lit place in the village. The threads of light tie us together, but I cut the threads — I turn the lamp off. It's been days since I've been alone at night.

All I hear is silence. Always, even in Isolation, there were noises. Here there are no steam pipes, no screaming, no siren on the highway at the edge of the grounds, nobody banging on the wall. How do you shut out silence? Once I could make my own noise inside my head so I wouldn't have to hear theirs, but the doctor took that away. I used to steal other people's medication and take it because, when you feel really bad, you don't notice what's going on so much.

Damn that doctor for taking away my magic and giving me nothing to replace it. And he's not even here to tell me what to do now. I cry myself to sleep that night, and somewhere all that crying has a core of loss. Most of it, of course, is put on because I can't cry unless I put on.

I wake early, like a kid, full of hope and thinking I heard a familiar sound outside. It's just getting light. I hurry out, but it's only Don, still drunk, trying to close the gate. He gives it up and stumbles toward the church. At sunrise, he rings the church bell, fighting back the silence.

I hear it from the privy, and when I come back to the house, I realize I never even pulled the back door shut. I try to whip up the panic, but it won't come. There's nobody in the village but us.

I pump a kettle full of water, start a fire in the stove, and set out what I'll need for baking bread. I learned to do that at thirteen, in a foster home where the rules were admirably clear: work or starve. My hands and arms still remember how dough goes.

As I knead the dough, I look out into the garden and wonder how to get chickens for the chicken yard. My grandmother's half-sister had chickens; we stayed with her a while when I was seven. I thought she was Orphan Annie — the same hair, the same eyes — but it was cataracts that made her eyes white.

Chickens are warm, and their voices are mostly soft. They are dusty, and their smell is unclean. I don't really like them, but I want some. Of course, there are no chickens.

When I have set the bread to rise, I dust so I can touch things again. I sweep the floors, too. When I find long, white hairs tangled in the broom, I have to stop and yank them all out and burn them in the stove even though they stink.

The water is hot, finally, and I make coffee. While it is resting, I go out and pick violets and lilies of the valley. There is one right bowl to hold them; one day I will find another so that the choice will be mine and not hers.

Wally comes over, keeping out of sight in case Don is looking out the tavern window. I give him a cup of coffee. He has a bruise on one side of his face that is swelling his eye shut, but I have nothing to put on it. We sit for a



long time at the kitchen table, not talking. Finally, Johnny comes out of the tavern, and I call to him. He comes to the window to say that Don's passed out. Wally sighs, gets up, goes off.

Someday I may kill Don.

I take fresh bread to the tavern for supper that night. They don't tell me how good it is, but they eat it all.

"Ed figured out how to get the waterwheel going," Susan says. "He's going to take control over the power for me so I can feel those big millstones grinding together."

The next day, the others take houses of their own. Johnny and Maria take the big house across from the mill, and Ed and Susan move into the mill itself. Wally and Don try out a couple of places, but they go back to the tavern. The day after that, Don says it's Sunday and makes us go to church, where he imitates a mass.

What surprises me is that we aren't bored, even though there's nothing going on and no television. When Maria finds a live caterpillar — one — we all go to look at it like it's something important. When I see a bird flying north, I tell people. And I bake bread, Ed grinds flour, and Johnny and Maria scream at us and at each other.

Terror comes at the end of the second week, dressed like an old man with a horse and wagon. We hide and listen as the wagon and the horse go up to the church. We hear the horse drink from the trough, and we hear the old man's voice shake as he calls out something we don't understand. We listen to him cough.

Still, it takes us almost an hour to get brave enough to show ourselves. The old man has brought things, probably all he has. A cow and a calf are tied behind the wagon, and there are two crates of chickens, one with a rooster. There's no way to ask where they came from. The old man points to the cemetery, to himself, to the church, to show he wants Christian burial. He is terrified of us, and we don't even know the name of the language he speaks so tentatively.

Don, in full lace and flounces, ushers the old man into the church and starts a mass. The old man, his voice trembling, makes responses exactly as if Don were a real priest, doing it right. After mass, Don and Wally help the old man into the house by the church, and put the bed where he can see the street. We hear him coughing all night.

Don gives him last rites the next morning. It upsets Maria that the old man can't tell Don isn't a real priest, and she stands out in the street, yelling at him until Johnny drags her away. That afternoon, we dig the old man's grave so he can see it. We get fancy clothes out of the chests in the houses and put them on to let him know that we will dress up for his funeral. He weeps, so we take the clothes off again and stay out of sight.

The coughing stops that night, very late, and we listen to the silence. In the morning, Don tolls the big bell for him. We all put on the clothes and

carry him to the churchyard. Don says the parts he can remember, and we do the burial plain, with almost real mourning.

Johnny brings the horse and the cow to the grave, as if to show them that their master's dead and they're ours now. I wonder if anyone has ever seen Johnny be the way he is with those animals — as if they are three friends who like to do things together. He spends most of his time with them, and Maria doesn't scream at him so much.

Don moves into the priest's quarters after the funeral, and it soon becomes clear he'll have nothing more to do with Wally. In his dark cassock, he walks gravely through the village every morning, seeing how we're doing. He says things straight, as if he wasn't trying to tease us.

Wally doesn't understand. At first he goes down and stands outside the window to the priest's quarters several times a day, but he never says anything or goes inside. Sometimes he doesn't even let Don see him. Except, of course, on Sunday he goes to mass with the rest of us.

We put the old man's chickens into the chicken yard behind my house because my yard's the biggest. Wally likes to feed them. Sometimes he picks one up and walks around with it for a while. We know enough to let the hens keep their eggs, and in a few weeks, when the roses are in full bloom, there are chicks enough for all.

Ed and Susan have ducklings, too. A pair of ducks settled on the mill-pond, and Susan feeds them and now their babies by hand to keep them there. I gave Maria a hen and some chicks, but she won't keep them in her chicken yard — it would be imprisoning them. So the chickens eat her garden, scratch her dooryard underfoot, and crap in her kitchen. And someday there will be hawks to menace them and no chicken wire to protect them, but I don't say anything.

They think I'm showing off if I say things. Susan fixed what she called Chinese peas, but they weren't Chinese — just they hadn't been pollinated, so the pods were empty — and I said so. Maria said I was showing off and there was plenty of food and why should I worry about it?

"Anyway, I hate bees," Susan said.

They probably expected us to kill each other when they dumped us here, but we didn't. If we were on television, we'd look like three ordinary young couples and a priest, come out from the city to start over. Of course, it's still not the same, as if we'd never been in a hospital.

One night a bad thunderstorm comes up, scaring us. Lightning takes three giant steps through the village: it hits the lightning rod at the mill, then the church, then the big pine beyond the warehouse. The top of the church and the pine burn a long time, until the rain gets heavy and puts them out. Melted lead from part of the church roof drips off and splashes and hardens on the ground.

Ed gets so scared God is angry with us for being on our own, he starts hiding again. In the hospital, they gave him haloperidol whenever he started

hiding, and Susan goes through every house in the village — even the ones the rest of us are living in — looking for those little green tablets but not finding any.

For days, Ed keeps going from the lightning rod to the church to the pine whenever we aren't looking. Finally, he finds a piece of melted lead that hardened into a shape sort of like the outline of the mill with its mill wheel. He makes Susan come look at it, then the rest of us.

"Look," he says. "It's a sign!"

And he takes it to the mill with him and keeps it close for about a week, then puts it on the mantel in the miller's quarters, where he can touch it if he wants to. He seems all right again.

When Don tells Johnny and Maria that it's time for them to get married, Maria goes into a rage and shrieks that she is not pregnant, that nobody can make her get pregnant, and that we are rotten bastards for trying to scare her. She says sex is good, and we have no right to make her feel guilty.

I don't know why, but it never occurred to me that crazy people could have babies just like everyone else. We're defective — surely, that ought to make some difference.

In the end, Maria calms down. Susan and I find wedding clothes for her in the chests, and spread flowers for her in the church, and Wally makes a cake with icing for the party after. John has the horse watch from the church doorway as he takes Maria and Maria takes him. We dance in the tavern in fancy clothes to an old Victrola, and know that somehow imitation people playing at wedding have committed a sacrament.

Ed and Susan are next, a few weeks later. Don found fireworks in the warehouse, and for their wedding, he sets them off as soon as it's dark enough. The rockets go up into the soft night and burst, showering color down over the millpond.

It scares me that Maria and Susan will have babies. I am afraid that Maria will fly into a rage and kill her baby or Susan will smother hers in her own despair. I say this to Don, and he says, "Pray to God such things will not happen." I tell him no, I don't believe in God. He asks me if I want them to kill their babies. I say no. He says, "Then pray!"

So I do, every morning when I get up, even though I still don't believe in God — or in Don, for that matter. When Wally stays the night with me — to punish Don — he pretends not to watch, but he never says it's silly.

I think about children a lot. My mother told me that children break the spell so you get old and die. I wouldn't mind that. What frightens me is that children are real — babies especially. Sometimes I wake up thinking about that, sweating, the way I used to wake up back at the hospital.

Wally isn't afraid of children, he's afraid of me — but not as often as he was at first. It doesn't bother me, any more than it bothers me if he still has to pretend I'm someone else when he has sex with me. I'm pregnant anyway, and it won't be long before Don notices and makes us get married.

In the meanwhile, we don't think much about the world. Don tells us, over and over, how terrorists stole this special plague and let it loose, and how it killed three out of four people in the world, and most of the animals, and even insects.

Wally thinks it's true. He's climbed to the top of the church every week since the lightning struck — he's mending the roof — and looked out all around. He says you see six villages from there, but he's never once seen chimney smoke from any of them, or the dust of a car, and we've never heard a plane or seen a contrail.

I can't think about all those billions. It's like trying to think about how everybody who ever lived has died. I think a lot about the mound across the end of the graveyard, though. I wonder if they're thinking inside there, if they know about us. It's because they're in that mound that we're here. It's as if we're the children of this village now — unwanted, fatal, but reborn anyway.

Don worries us. He talks about holiness a lot now. I think it's the eyes in that holy picture he keeps looking at. He says mass like he believes it, and talks to us about penance. We can't tell if he's teasing us again or if he means it.

It's near the end of summer and very hot. Wally and I are cooling off in the millpond, scandalizing the ducks. Across the pond, Johnny has brought the cow and calf down to drink, with the horse coming along behind. We wave, and he nods, then bends over as if to tell the cow who's here.

I wish the guard could see us. He was talking to the helicopter pilot before we took off, talking loud as though we couldn't hear. He said, "They're all of them violent." He pointed at Wally. "That one tried to kill a nurse just for taking a kitten away from him. God knows what he was going to do to it. Johnny there, he tried to take out a couple of guards." He went on through the list of us while I tried to turn my ears off.

We're different now, even if the Blue Fairy never did come to make us real. I ask Wally if he ever saw the picture about the wooden puppet and the Blue Fairy. I tell him how scared I am of having a real baby when I'm not real yet myself.

All Wally says is "Don't worry, Maggie, the baby won't care." Then he swims around behind me and pinches my bottom to take my mind off being afraid.

The next morning is Sunday again, and we are so used to having Don ring the church bell about eight o'clock that, when he doesn't do it, it's as though we had heard something scary. We tell ourselves it's all right, but soon the expectation of sound has all of us so nervous we go to church anyway, to wait for him.

His play-acting gives shape to our lives. If he's tired of playing priest, who will tell us what to do? We'll need to go to the other villages for the grain and seeds in their warehouses, but we're afraid of what we might find there.

Who will make us go? And suppose he goes back to jumping out and scaring us, or teasing us — or hurting Wally.

"I bet he went somewhere to call the hospital to come for us," Ed says.

John goes to look for him and comes back, shaking his head. Don isn't there. "I found this," he says, holding up a bloody towel.

We don't understand — we don't know what to do.

The church bell startles us, and we turn to see who rang it. A black monk, the hood pulled too far forward to let us see his face, clasped hands hidden in deep sleeves, comes down the steps, walks to the altar, and kneels in prayer. I count Mississippi fifty-two before he gets up, turns to us, and pushes the hood back so we can see him.

He smiles, but it's not a stoned-out-of-his-skull smile or a "gotcha" smile. It's pleasant, even friendly. "I have taken your sufferings upon me. I will do your penance for you." He holds his robe open long enough to show all of us the bloody cross he's carved on his chest, then he starts the service. We know he's not playing.

This isn't like when you sit in the dayroom and burn your wrist with a lit cigarette just to feel something. This is serious crazy. The cross has to be six inches long, and it isn't just that he could get an infection. He has a kind of exalted expression, as though he can't see us anymore.

Maria thinks he sees God. "He's a saint," she says, and she starts to sob.

Thoughts burst out like popping corn. Of course he's a saint. He's found a metaphor even older than this church, and stronger. Sainthood is a craziness you don't have to be cured of. Maria's on her knees now like she can already see the halo.

So he's grabbed all the magic, all the mystic power for himself, and left us with how deep do you plant carrots and when's the best time to go search the other villages. Well, maybe Don needs the magic more than we do. After all, nobody's ever going to make him bishop.

I realize something, and it's like the last of the chains dropping off. We don't any of us have to be cured. All we have to do is get the seed, plant it, take care of it, grow food. Even crazy people can do that — we don't have to be real.



# DREAMTIGERS

by Robert Frazier  
art: George Barr



*The author lives on Nantucket Island — about 20 miles south of Cape Cod — with his wife, Karol, who is a professional basket maker, and his thirteen-year-old daughter, Timalyne.*

*His science-oriented poetry has been appearing in the SF magazines since 1976, and many of his poems have been anthologized. Only recently has he turned to writing fiction, and this tale is his first such effort.*

### Sept. 27

This morning at the university hospital, Fenneman said I was a biased observer because I was as displaced as the Hmong, because I dreamed of the Africa of my father. I disagreed.

Today marked my third visit to the church, and still the adults spoke to me in monosyllabic grunts. Cloistered in the basement on a row of second-hand couches, they sat like temple statues carved from a single block of granite. See no evil. Hear no evil. Speak no evil. Fenneman assured me that this was typical of Hmong refugees, but I sensed more behind it. They hid something with the *appearance* of evil, though no real proof presented itself.

Only the young girl, who withheld her name, spoke freely. She flirted as best as she could, yet all she talked about was the bland food, the mildew smell in the basement carpet, and the TV that the minister promised to bring by sometime in the future.

She also mentioned Tou's insomnia. Four words of broken English. "No sleep. No good."

### Sept. 30

Mama-san served me weak twig tea and talked during my whole visit. This was progress.

Surprisingly, she conversed quite well, though her accent was thick with Vietnamese stresses and run-together syllables. I gathered she was homesick. She wanted to go back, but Tou won't hear of it. From her voice I envisioned the land she longed for. It was the central highlands — about Da Lat — she missed, and not the crowded camps in Laos. Not Cambodia. She wore her hair with dignity, in a grey bun, but the wrinkles about her eyes and nose revealed her weariness. She must be a pale shadow of her old self. The Hmong lived like kings in their mountain villages.

Being so far from home was not healthy for her, she said. I believed that it was her son she spoke for.

### Oct. 7

Tou looked terrible.

Fenneman blamed it on the cold season, said not to worry, but I have become familiar with Tou and his family. The Minnesota chill did penetrate the old hulking Lutheran church, and Lutherans weren't exactly aware of their thick-skinned immunities — or attitudes — but it wasn't the weather or the penny-pinching habits of the churchgoers that affected his health.

He sat the whole hour, staring at the far wall of the basement room, one used for Bible school during summer vacation. He stared at a life-sized poster of Jesus flanked by the lion and the lamb. He said something that Mama-san translated. He said Jesus was not real. In real life the tigers ate the lambs.

I have asked Fenneman for a more detailed history of Tou, of the time be-

fore he came to Minneapolis. I thought it would be important to our study of the dream deaths.

## Oct. 12

Tou was a scout for ARVN forces during the Vietnam War, and was one of the first to evacuate his family when the shit hit the fan in 1975. He survived three documented attacks of yellow rain in northern Laos.

I asked Mama-san if this changed his health, but she would not answer me. The young girl said he was healthy as an ox; he was still potent. Were these hints of an incestuous relationship? Tou just flexed his biceps and grinned like an idiot.

It should be noted that they avoided him. The family has moved into the kitchen area and left Tou in the study room. Even Mama-san, who obviously loved her son, avoided him. I got angry toward the end of the visit, which startled the young girl and her usually distant brother. I accused Mama-san of neglect. I said she should urge Tou to see a doctor. She shrugged me off, and the lines about her round cheeks and narrowed eyes deepened into creases.

No, she said. The doctor could do nothing. It was the *bangungut* that had him. Fenneman translated that as the nightmare syndrome, first studied in Philippine males. Victims would thrash and cough in their sleep and sometimes couldn't be resuscitated. In our studies we've called them dream deaths.

That noon, just as I was to leave, the young girl stopped me. Her touch lingered, her bronze hand on my black one. She had made herself very pretty, and said to come back that night.

My dreams were also disturbed. I saw a shadow, hers perhaps, stalking me along the veldt.

## Oct. 26

I made excuses to Fenneman, and to all my colleagues at the U. of M. hospitals, and took a few days to canoe the lakes. The young girl offered the kind of trouble I could do without.

She did not look at me during the return visit, though she dutifully sat with Mama-san while she poured cup after cup of tea. But when I left, she stopped me again.

"Tou not sleep. Not Good. Come back tonight."

There was no tenderness in her voice, only concern.

## Oct. 26, evening

I returned with groceries and a gallon of ice cream. We sat together by the stove — with the oven on, door ajar — until long after Tou shut off the TV and went to bed.

Tou awoke screaming. Mama-san urged me to sit through it, so I watched



the dark rectangle of the doorway until Tou emerged into the light of the kitchen area. He shrugged upon seeing me and sat down for tea. Mama-san and the girl moved onto their mattresses away from the stove. The boy, whose name was Tang, sat and translated. To my surprise, Tang spoke excellent English. He did not avoid his father.

Tou said that his dreams foretold the future. The Hmong interpreted dreams that way, and always had. The previous night, he'd dreamed of the water buffalo crossing his path. A bad luck omen, simple as that.

Fenneman promised reluctantly to consult the Hmong files.

## Nov. 2

My work on dream deaths has, after all, been complicated by my involvement with Tou's family. I discovered that I care. At that moment, my data seemed more suspect than it might by a mere invocation of Heisenberg's Uncertainty. Fenneman and I argued about this, and other things, before my visit. On the causes of Hmong deaths, he sided with a congenital weakness in the autonomic system. Another colleague cited Mead's writings on Oceania, on how rapid cultural changes affect men more adversely than women. I claimed this nature-nurture crap created cultural perception barriers, beyond which lurked something unexplained.

I was late for my visit because I took the time to research Hmong beliefs at the university library.

Hmong *did* attribute great power to their dreams.

I asked Tou about the water buffalo. He, if the translation was correct, believed that the water buffalo was a sign of the hunted, that a tiger must always follow close behind. Hmong believed that dreamtigers stalked those who abandoned the burial grounds of their ancestors. The tiger was an avenger, he said, his voice raised.

Greatly disturbed, Tang left the room. From a crude conversation with Tou, I gathered that Tang feared being too involved with his father now. Since a dreamtiger welcomed new prey, it might also stalk a person who tried to help the victim.

Was this a warning?

Fenneman the skeptic offered no help.

He claimed Borges did it better.

## Nov. 3

Fenneman's inbreeding theory was not substantiated. Evidence in an obscure anthropological field journal stated that the Hmong consider consanguinity up to the third generation as an obstacle to betrothal.

I still rejected the nurture viewpoint, too. In American minorities and ethnic groups, the woman suffered more than the men, which was certainly true of black women whom I dated.

I decided to visit Tou's family again that night. I needed data with more

substance.

Concrete data.

### **Nov. 3, evening**

Fenneman and I had a falling out. He sneaked into my office and listened to my tapes. I didn't return there to record my day's observations, and I have resolved to record directly in the field.

Mama-san met me at the door in great distress.

Tou evidently had a vision of his dead wife. She hobbled toward him from the kitchen on legs which the VC had broken before they raped and killed her.

Tou had been drinking heavily, Mama-san said. I heard him crying in the other room.

Tang and I calmed him at first, helping him to the bathroom to puke. After we cleaned him up, I tried to lead him into the kitchen, but he wouldn't budge.

Mama-san and the girl cowered in the kitchen corner. Soon, Tang joined them.

### **Later**

Tou entered sleep fitfully, and he awakened several times. He spoke only in the Hmong dialect when he cried out. It was a long night for us both. Exhaustion wore on me. I longed to stretch out on the couch at last and fall asleep.

### **Still later**

I shouldn't have napped. I should have left him, left him and joined the others in their fear.

When the faint rays of morning glowed in the small access windows near the ceiling of the basement room, Tou awoke howling. His muscles were taut as steel cables. He was icy cold. He appeared to be locked in a sleeping equivalent of delirious tremens, characterized by clammy sweats, shaking, and outcries of fear. Groggy and off balance, I tumbled to his bedside and held him as wave after wave of spasms wracked his frame. The final one, which arched his back, weakened him until he died in convulsions in my arms, and that must have been when it happened.

The last cold motions of his life were faint, but they sent chills along my arms to my spine and sent cold reverberations throughout my flesh.

Afterward, I could not warm myself, even next to the gas heater. Though Tou's family mourned over his body, they would flee when I approached them. They said I had Tou's mark on me.

### **Nov. 4, morning**

Damn Fenneman's rule that requires observation only after reflection. I

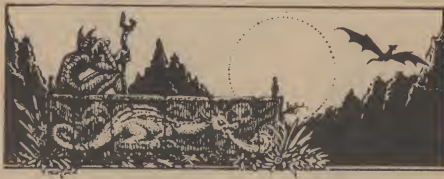
am too exhausted to mess with the recorder. I am leaving it on until the tape runs to an end.

And damn Fenneman altogether for being right. If I'd only remained unbiased on this case.

Now in the light of the rising sun, I daydream of my father's village in South Africa — a homeland I had almost forgotten — as I drift into sleep. The dry ochre grasses are tall and extend to the horizon line. Nearby, a Bataleur eagle stretches its black neck to tear at a reptile on the limb of a lone yellowwood. I imagine myself, spear firmly in hand, following the wildebeests to the water holes.

I know a dreamtiger can't be far behind.

Beware, strange demon. The veldt is my territory, not yours. And the sun here beats on my black skin, warming it at last. ❶



## A DETACHED INTERPRETATION OF *VOYAGER'S* GREETING TO EXTRATERRESTRIALS

Two beasts  
sizes 1.55 and 1.42 A.U.  
(their measure)  
gave birth to  
or tend  
a row of eggs  
gene- or chromosome-variable  
(though none were found on board)  
and they wear no clothes.

— John Devin

## UNDER HER SKIN

by Susan Casper

art: George Barr



*Susan Casper was born and still lives in Philadelphia, where she attended Temple University. Her stories have appeared in Playboy, Isaac Asimov's, and The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction; this is her first for us. She is at work on a novel and has edited an anthology, Jack the Ripper, for Tor Books.*

Kathy had broken a rule of Fat. Broken two of them in fact, that very evening.

It wasn't as if she didn't know better — she had been fat for a very long time. Long enough to know that there were many things that fat people were just not supposed to do . . . like going out in blue jeans and no make-up, or showing off their intelligence. Those were minor rules and she had gotten away with breaking them on occasion. But tonight . . . tonight she had broken two of the Cardinal Rules of Fat, and she knew that she would have to pay the price.

First, she had allowed Becky, her friend from work, to talk her into going to a singles bar with a dance floor. Fat people should *never* go dancing. If you just sit there and refuse to dance, your friends are embarrassed for you and at the same time annoyed that you are spoiling the party; somebody always feels obligated to sit out a few dances to keep you company, halfheartedly trying to bellow out small talk over the frenzied pitch of the music; and then you feel like the wettest of wet blankets. On the other hand, if you did allow yourself to be coaxed out under the strobes ("Oh come *on*, it's fun. You'll *enjoy* it!"), it was worse. Much worse. Fat people dancing looked like jello on a trampoline. Sweating and puffing to make it through even one number, knowing that behind the veil of dimness people were laughing — snickering, snorting in derision, making comparisons to balloons full of water and waltzing hippos. . . .

So, one Cardinal Rule broken. But then, to make things worse, she had broken the most serious rule of all: she had been caught staring at a handsome young man across the room, and he had started staring *back* . . . and now he was getting up, and *now* — oh God! — he was actually walking toward her! She checked quickly behind; but no, it was her he was aiming at. Horrified and fascinated both, she stared at him for another second before snatching her gaze away. He was dressed in an expensive-looking suit, quite conservative compared with the leather and glitter she saw around her, a bit somber and somehow European in cut. He had dark hair, slicked back unfashionably, which accented his gaunt and handsome face. His dark eyes shone like glass, even in the dim light of the bar; and his frame was as thin as hers was fat.

She looked to Becky for help. Her friend had dragged her into this place under protest, and so she was at least partially responsible. But Becky was bobbing away on the dance floor, as far out of reach as if she were in Moscow, leaving Kathy to deal with the problem alone. Just what would it be? A bet, a dare, a hazing prank? She'd watched enough TV to know that a guy as handsome as this couldn't be interested in *her*. She sighed wistfully. If only one of those diets had been successful. She worked so hard at them. . . . She pointedly turned her back on the approaching stranger and noticed the huge slab of cherry cheesecake that the skinny little brunette at the next table was eating. It made her mouth water, and she toyed with the idea of ordering one

for herself, but she knew that she was probably going to gain ten pounds just from looking at it across the aisle.

"Would you care to dance?" he said, his voice coming suddenly from close behind her. It was an impressive voice, deep and resonant as a pipe organ.

She took a gulp from her glass of Light Chablis with such unsteady hands that she felt it dribble down her cheek and through the folds of her neck, then she turned to sneer up at him coldly. She shook her head brusquely.

Undaunted, he smiled at her. "Ah, that's good," he said. "I'm not much of a one for dancing, myself." Before she could protest, he had eased himself into the table's only other chair. Kathy sat stiffly, a napkin pressed to the wet spot on her blouse, not quite daring to look at him. This *had* to be a joke. How could people be so cruel? Ignoring her obvious tension, he aimed an enchanting smile in her direction, and suavely signalled the waitress to bring Kathy another drink.

"Aren't *you* going to have something?" she asked, forgetting for the moment that she wasn't going to speak to him.

"I never drink . . . wine," he said. He wiggled his eyebrows, Groucho style. Strangely enough, he *could* have played Dracula. He was sleek and dark and strangely compelling, and he did have a faint trace of some unidentifiable foreign accent. The thought made Kathy giggle.

His name, it turned out, was Greg. "Not Gregory," he explained, "Gregor. Mama was very pretentious." Thawing a little in spite of her better judgement, Kathy said that she thought it would be nice to have a different sort of name. Three quarters of the girls in her school had been Kathys. He gave her that radiant smile again, so warm, so sensitive, so sympathetic.

They talked for an hour, really *talked*; and slowly, reluctantly, grudgingly, Kathy felt her suspicions fade away. This couldn't be happening to her . . . but it was. He was in the midst of telling her that he felt out of place in the nine-to-five world, that he had spent the last few years just drifting around, when all of a sudden, to her own surprise, she heard her own voice suggesting that perhaps they should "drift" over to her place. . . . She held her breath. *This* was the point where the karmic lightning bolt would come out of the ceiling and hit her square in the ass. Would Greg turn out to be a priest, or gay, or married . . . or worse yet, a married gay priest? Maybe he would recoil indignantly, proclaiming that he would *never* do such a thing — at least, not with her. Instead, he lightly touched her hand, looked soulfully into her eyes, and led her out of the bar.

Kathy's apartment consisted of three tiny rooms with an entry through the kitchen. They threw their coats on the table and she opened the refrigerator door. While she searched desperately for something to serve to company, he sorted idly through the contents that she left untouched, prying open jars, lifting the aluminum foil to peek inside bowls. Nothing seemed to interest him. No *wonder* he was so thin. . . . He drifted off toward the living

room, moving with languid grace, almost seeming not to touch the ground. She rejected the frozen low-cal dinners, the sugarless jelly and the fruit canned in grape juice, wishing all the while that she had the will-power to keep real food, like cookies or chips and dip around for moments like these. What she wouldn't do at that moment for an éclair. Finally, she pulled out some crackers and an old brick of cheddar and, cutting away the browned edges, she followed after him with the plate.

He was already seated, leaning into the corner of the sofa with his arm stretched across the back, looking as inviting as a Christmas dinner. His jacket was off, and he had opened his collar at the throat. He was very sexy. She put the plate down onto the coffee table and leaned back into his arm. Then she noticed where he had put his jacket. It hung very neatly over the antique mirror her mother had given her to fill the empty space over the TV.

"Let me put that away for you," she said.

"No, Kathy . . . please." He put out a hand to stop her. "The light reflects from it. So bright . . . I'm very sensitive to light. It . . . hurts my eyes." Kathy glanced at him oddly; she was beginning to wonder if there wasn't something a little strange about her friend. . . .

*How silly,* she told herself. *You've been watching too many old movies, that's what's wrong with you.* She settled back, allowing him to put his arm around her again. A little while later, she allowed him to turn off the light. And then . . .

A few hours later, she emerged from the bedroom in a haze of pleasant lethargy, stumbled into the bathroom, and switched on the light.

The first thing she saw when her eyes had adjusted to the sudden glare, staring into the bathroom mirror, were the two ugly welts on the side of her neck.

Kathy gasped. Her eyes grew wide. She stared incredulously at herself. They were bite marks alright. Unmistakable. And something seemed to have happened to her chin, where the skin hung in sudden new folds . . .

*And you read Mr. Goodbar too,* she thought in sudden panic. *What a fool!* She should have known better than to pick up a total stranger and bring him home. *Now* she would pay the penalty for her foolishness! She grabbed her poor injured throat and waited a moment to die. Then, when death did not take her instantly, she let out a whoop, and charged back into the bedroom.

"You!" she shrieked. "You *are* a vampire. I knew it!" Her hand hit the light switch and she watched him recoil from the sudden glare. "How could you *sit* there, pretending to be so nice?" He smiled at her sheepishly. "My God!" she said. "You're a vampire and you've drunk my blood! I want it *back*," she said with determination.

"Kathy, it's not what you think . . ." he said weakly. But now she was beginning to cry. She did a belly flop onto the bed, hiccupping and spraying tears. He rolled to one side to avoid her and got to his feet.

"You're . . . a . . . vam . . . pire," she wheezed between gasps.

"I'm not!" he said petulantly, staring down at his clasped hands.

"You're *not*?" She looked up at him hopefully.

"Well . . . I guess I am."

She began to cry again. "But it's not what you *think*," he continued hurriedly. "I didn't hurt you." She began to whoop even more loudly. "Really, I didn't!"

"Oh r-right," she sobbed. "You just drank my b-blood —"

"I don't drink blood," he snapped, looking very offended.

Kathy stopped crying. "You don't?"

He shook his head.

She pushed herself into a sitting position and squinted up at him suspiciously. "Of *course* you do. That's what vampires *do*. What would you live on if you didn't drink blood?"

"Fat," he replied with quiet dignity.

"Fat?" she said. Her eyes grew wide.

"Fat," he replied firmly. "No blood. Just fat. I only take fat."

"You — you drank my fat?" Kathy said dazedly.

He nodded glumly.

"You drank my *fat*?"

There was a silence.

"It's okay. I'll go," he said gloomily, his voice full of heavy Slavic melancholy. "I know that there can be nothing more between us . . . now."

She kept staring at him. Almost unconsciously, her hand came up to touch the loose flap of skin where her double chins had been. "Well . . ." she said cautiously, "I'd hate to make you walk the streets this late at night . . ."

It was a very long weekend, and when Kathy got up Monday morning to get dressed for work she was pleased to see how baggy her pants had become.

On Tuesday, her pants were so loose on her that Becky and some of her other friends at the office made wondering comments about it. Babs asked her if she was sick.

On Wednesday, Kathy's bra was puckered at the tips; and on Thursday, her panty hose were sagging. Becky pressed her for an explanation, but, "See what the love of the right man can do for you," was all that Kathy would say.

On Friday, Kathy was forced to buy a belt in order to keep her clothing on at all; she was beginning to look like an anorexic swaddled in a tent. It was the perfect excuse to visit the boutique she'd been embarrassed to stick her head into before, and the belt she came away with was attached to the prettiest and most expensive dress she'd ever owned. Greg would love it. She could hardly *wait* for evening to roll around . . .

But that evening Greg did not show up at his regular time. She waited and waited and waited, throughout an endless night and into the early hours of



the morning, praying that he hadn't gone away for good, praying that she would get to see him at least one more time. . . . She was just beginning to despair when, long after midnight, there was a hesitant knock at the door. She threw the door open, and there was Greg, standing with his shoulders hunched, looking hangdog and depressed. They stared at each other.

"I shouldn't have come," he said at last, gloomily.

"I'm glad that you did," she said.

"I just came to say goodbye," he said. "I know I shouldn't have; it would have been easier just to go without seeing you again. . . . But I found I just *had* to see you one more time —"

"Greg," she said, putting her hand on his arm and drawing him inside. "I don't want you to go."

"And I don't want to go, Kathy," he said passionately. "But I must. Look how thin you've gotten! If I stay with you much longer, you'll die. I don't want to go to another, but . . ." He shrugged tragically. "But I must have human fat if I am to survive. There is no other way."

"Yes, there is," Kathy said calmly. She tugged him further into the kitchen. "I *knew* it was going to come to this. . . . So this morning I went shopping."

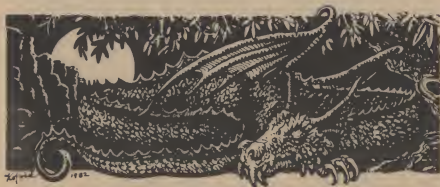
With a flourish, she threw the refrigerator door open wide.

Inside, crowded together in tightly packed rows were cakes and pastries and cookies; spaghetti and frozen pizza; containers of potato salad; pudding, candy, creampuffs and frozen pies; lasagna and cherry cheesecake and danish (both prune and cheese) and container after container of ice cream in every possible flavor, except tutti frutti.

He stared at the refrigerator. "You . . ." he said, his voice hoarse with emotion. "You would do *this* . . . for me?"

Kathy reached into an open box and took out a chocolate éclair. Determinedly, she bit into it.

"It'll be tough," she said around an enormous mouthful of chocolate and pastry and cream filling. "But for you . . . I'll make the sacrifice." ❀



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If you ever saw *Invaders from Mars*, you'd probably never forget it.

I am, of course, talking about the William Cameron Menzies' classic from 1953. And, from the early shot of something crashing into a sandpit behind young David MacLean's house to the nightmarish vision of David running away from the alien-controlled residents of his town, this film's surrealist, paranoid fantasy terrified a whole generation of impressionable kids gulping butter-coated popcorn at a 25-cent matinee.

Back then, it was more or less accepted that aliens were generally evil, eager to relocate to the prime real estate of planet Earth. And despite the peaceful message of Michael Rennie's Klaatu in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, the 1950s and the early 1960s were halcyon times of menacing beings from distant galaxies.

2001, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, and *E.T.* changed all that, and for a while it seemed that we'd seen the last of the bug-eyed monsters. But a little benevolence goes a long way,

and after a long dry spell, we started to get some real aliens just like those that appeared during the good old days. TV had the lizard-like, mouse-munching invaders of *V*, while John Carpenter blew everyone away with the special-effects overkill of *The Thing*.

And now we've been treated to a whole summer of threats from beyond — barrel-bodied Martians, a human metamorphosis, and the king of relentless creatures, H. R. Giger's alien. Two of the films, *Invaders from Mars* and *The Fly*, are remakes of fondly remembered SF shockers from the 1950s, whereas *Aliens* is a sequel to what is probably the most powerful horror film ever made.

*Invaders from Mars* was done, most certainly, in homage to the original film. Director Tobe Hooper said, "The original *Invaders from Mars* burned holes in my brain." Hooper tried to keep the surreal atmosphere of the film, most notably in the sandpit and the odd fence that leads up to it. "For

all its sparseness, the image of the hillside with its split-rail fence disappearing over the horizon has an aura of foreboding fear that cannot be improved upon. So, we kept it intact.”

The story also remains the same, albeit with the full component of state-of-the-art creatures and effects.

David Gardner, played with a winning sincerity by Hunter Carson, sees an egg-shaped spaceship land in a sandpit near his house. Soon, his parents and most of his neighbors have strange wounds in the back of their necks, as they have been sucked into the pit to become servants of the Martian Supreme Intelligence.

David discovers an ally at his school who believes his story, the school nurse played by his real-life mom, Karen Black. He also stumbles upon his alien-controlled teacher (played with wonderful venom by Louise Fletcher), who gulps down a laboratory frog — with difficulty, I might add — as green drool drips down her chin.

Anyone got a napkin?

It’s a great scene, though it tends to put the brakes to the popcorn-munching.

David eventually gets the U.S. Marines (whose captain informs us, “. . . aren’t afraid of any Martians”) to attack the spaceship. The Martians, big, lumbering drones and a Lovecraftian Supreme Intelligence, are rather ineffective in defending their ship, as David helps the Marines blow up the ship. The film ends, as did Menzies’, with David waking up from the nightmare only to see a real ship land.

And while the original *Invaders* features 7-foot drones in velour outfits with zippers, Hooper’s *Invaders* features creatures and effects designed by the finest talents in the industry.

John Dykstra, whose award-winning

effects helped shape *Star Wars*, *Battlestar Gallactica*, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, and *Outland*, was the designer of special visual effects for the film. Dykstra also did some second-unit directing.

“Our original script,” Dykstra told me, “dealt with Menzies’ by way of making a contemporary film, keeping the same backdrop — small town U.S.A. and Martians that are essentially bad. Menzies created a film that had a kind of art-nouveau quality. We wanted to maintain that.”

One way Dykstra and his crew attempted to do that was through the Martian ship, seen very early in the film. “What we tried to do was create an organic ship with a force field around it.” He mentions that some of his work on the ship wasn’t used. “The original film’s concept wasn’t based on hardware. The original story was about a little kid. So we backed off a little from the ship. However, in the original story the kid spent a lot of time inside the ship being chased by the drones. And so, the drones became a little more important.”

The drones were the creation of master creature designer, Stan Winston. Winston, who created the unforgettable dog-transformation in Carpenter’s *The Thing* and the robot effects in *The Terminator*, was pleased with his drones.

“The drones were designed with the idea of coming up with something that didn’t look like a man in a suit. Bill Stout did the original drawings, and one of them had backward legs.” Winston took the drawing and came up with the idea of having a little person on a muscleman’s back, facing backward. The little person’s feet operated the drone’s mouth.

Asked about the drone’s big gulp mouth, Winston said, “I always

wanted to see the creature with an enormous mouth, reminiscent of the Tasmanian devil and the animated creature in *Forbidden Planet*. They were very mobile, and they worked very well. They were funny and interesting. Everything worked as we planned."

The Supreme Intelligence was a different story altogether.

John Dykstra filmed the emergence of Stan Winston's bizarre Supreme Intelligence. "It was out of control. There was some problem getting it to come out of its hole. The first time we shot the bugger out, everyone was standing around — the director, the producers, myself — just like it was a premiere. The door opens up, and the guy shoots out, comes out about 2 feet, does a perfect split S, and rolls on its back."

Dykstra laughs, then adds, "There were 12 guys operating it. The image of the creature coming out of the hole was so bizarre because it looked like it decided to make a nose dive. Funny as hell, but of course, nobody laughed."

The problem was eventually solved using wires and, despite his disappointment with its mobility, Stan Winston is justifiably proud of his Supreme Intelligence. "There are some wonderful things about it, from a design and technical aspect. The original Supreme Intelligence was basically a head with tentacles inside a glass ball. Director Tobe Hooper wanted to maintain certain elements of the first film, aesthetically, and yet free it up. We decided we weren't going to have it locked into a sphere. So I designed an exposed brain on the Supreme Intelligence that had a clear membranous covering. I tried to keep the face intelligent and spent a lot of energy on the face to have that look of an intelligent being, based on human

eyes and a human mouth."

The weapons also received an overhaul to match the drones. John Dykstra described the weapons from the Menzies' film. "They had hot plates on the end of what looked like a bazooka." The new weapons carried by the drones were globes that fire an unusual kind of disintegrator ray. "We were trying to get away from laser beams. It's more in keeping with the kitsch of the film. It isn't a technological beam, but more of the organomechanical quality of the alien ship."

Then there are more "contemporary" touches, none more entertaining than the hidden references to other films.

Of course, David goes to W. C. Menzies Elementary School. And James Hunt, who played the first David, appears as a cop who walks up to the sandpit and says, "I haven't been up here in years." And there's a newspaper delivery box outside David's house for *The Santa Mira Register*. A nice paper, I imagine, since it's the town taken over in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. And in one scene, David Gardner enters his basement and walks past the original Supreme Intelligence, while in his school's basement, there's an over-sized seed pod from you-know-who, sitting under the janitor's cot.

It's all fun to see — the creatures, the weapons, the Martian ship, and the movie references.

But somehow, the film fails to work its magic.

Unavoidably so.

First of all, there's the different milieu, the social background of the film. The early 1950s were the years of the Red menace, the communistic "aliens" who lived among us as friends and neighbors. Menzies' film became a parable of that fear.

Karen Black, who plays the nurse, sees the theme of the new film as still something we can relate to. "I think that the theme of people losing their souls to another force is a major theme. Almost everything tends to take our souls away. We have to really fight to 'keep' ourselves."

But I wonder whether that theme matches the power of the first film. It's one thing to trade in your altruistic ideals for an M.B.A. and a Porsche. Quite another to think that the mailman might be a Red agent.

And, we know the real power behind the first film is gone. We know that there are no invaders coming from Mars.

Then there's the viewpoint of the film. Menzies made it clear, in odd, surreal camera angles, that this was a kid's dream. "Here, general, I know how to shoot the Martian gun," freckle-faced David says in 1953, and we see the absurdity.

The same incident occurs in the new film, but it all happens realistically, and we feel we're not in the dream world of a child.

And despite some atmospheric shots by Tobe Hooper, such as his heavy use of shadows in the classroom and in David's home, and a great late-afternoon scene in the sandpit, the fast pace and disturbing mood of Menzies' *Invaders* is gone. The new film version moves slowly, and, despite one very tense scene when David returns home after school, the film is not very terrifying.

To me, that is.

The night I saw *Invaders from Mars* with my young son, it was thundering and lightning, a real Hudson Valley summer storm rumbling down toward New York. And the movie began and ended with the same kind of sudden tempest, letting some of the other-

worldliness spill out of the theater.

Later that night, my son woke up.

No nightmare, he reassured me, as he blinked to awareness. But just the same he wanted to pop into my bed, between my wife and me.

Maybe for him, and maybe for other kids, this is his movie, his *Invaders*, that he'll find himself remembering some 33 years later.

I saw *Alien* the day it opened, a hot summer afternoon in 1979.

There hadn't been a clue to its subject matter. The newspaper ads displayed some kind of egg cracking open and the now-famous tag line, "In space, no one can hear you scream."

Well, okay, I admit that was some kind of warning. And after it was all over, I loved the picture, even if I was put off eating spaghetti for a while. My weak-kneed wife, who always has me kill the errant spiders that invade our bedroom, came out with a massive headache.

It was, to put it mildly, an intense film.

*Alien* also gave us the most incredibly versatile, mean-spirited creature from another world that we're ever likely to see. The face-hugger that acted like an ovipositor chucking eggs down people's gullets, the bald-headed chest-burster that may be the nastiest little creature ever created, and the glistening, phallic-shaped adult alien — each stage in the alien's life cycle was more horrible than the next. And it seemed to have only one purpose in life: to grab people and stick embryonic chest-bursters inside them.

So, what could be worse?

How about dozens of them, maybe fifty or more crawling around like overgrown cockroaches, squeezing into narrow shafts, grabbing for anything alive. And have it all lovingly watched

over by a queen alien, gifted with a calculating intelligence and the instinct to lay even more eggs.

And that's what this new sequel, *Aliens*, offers us.

When I first spoke to Gale Anne Hurd, who produced *The Terminator* and had just finished producing *Aliens*, I asked her whether the new film had a quality similar to *The Terminator*. She asked me what I thought that quality was, and thinking for a moment, I said the sheer relentlessness of the film.

"Then this one," she said, "will be relentlessness cubed."

It was her utterly confident tone that told me that, have no fear, she was not exaggerating.

And yet *Aliens* is a strikingly different movie from Ridley Scott's classic SF horror film. *Aliens* is, Gale Anne Hurd said, "Very much a combat film."

The story is very straightforward.

Warrant Officer Ripley, played again by Sigourney Weaver, is awakened in space 57 years after the original incident. It's just luck, she's told, that she's been picked up and brought to the Gateway Space Station, orbiting Earth. She quickly learns that the planet of the alien, now named Acheron, has been terraformed (producing a breathable atmosphere) and (gasp!) colonized. The company that owned the scuttled *Nostromo*, blown up by Ripley in *Alien*, is skeptical of her story of the alien, and she's left to recuperate with some gruesome nightmares that director James Cameron thoughtfully shares with us.

Soon, we learn that all contact with the colony has been lost. A small contingent of American Marines, outfitted with powerful weapons and a massive armored personnel carrier, is sent to Acheron. Much to Ripley's chagrin, she is talked into going along,

since she's the only person who has dealt with the aliens.

The Marines land, enter the enormous atmospheric processing station, and gradually discover why the colonists have been so quiet. One survivor, a scruffy, small blonde girl named Newt, stayed alive by crawling through tiny shafts. She quite naturally provides an emotional hook for the audience as the aliens and the Marines begin to party.

Much of the action takes place inside the atmospheric processing station, and to create it, Gale Anne Hurd located an abandoned generating plant in London called the Acton Power Station.

"It had been out of commission for a number of years, and what we were able to do was fill in the alien structure," Hurd explained. "Something of this scope we could not have built. We could not have afforded to build it because it was many, many levels high, with catwalks and gratings, multiple levels of gratings that we could light from underneath which gave you an amazing look."

And it's made to look even larger through the visual-effects work of Robert Skotak. "What we did was create a portion of the location in miniature," he told me. "It made for a greatly expanded view, what was not really possible to achieve."

Stan Winston was responsible for all the film's creature effects, and he faced a problem not in the original.

"The only drawback of the original *Alien*," he said, "which I thought was the finest horror film of the decade, was revealing at the end that the alien was literally a man in a suit. Until that was revealed, it was extremely menacing and horrifying because, with very tight, quick cuts, you never knew what it was.

"Jim Cameron's idea was to have them move in very strange ways, in a non-human fashion, but in order to do so, they had to have a great deal of freedom of movement. So we designed the suit built over a spandex danskin so that all the stuntmen and people who wore it were able to move very freely and do rather extraordinary movements."

Winston also reworked the face-hugger. "We also had the face-huggers back in it, but with subtle changes and improvements. There in an entire chase scene with the scurrying, running face-hugger. We took the original concept and embellished it."

The creature effects are incredible. These adult aliens are more insectile, crawling, twisting like the worst nightmare of bugs that you ever had. In one scene, in the cocoon mass, aliens seem to emerge right out of the goocy walls while the Marines attempt to blow them away.

And despite heavy losses, the Marines do quite well. There are moments when this film has all the brash camaraderie of some classic John Wayne war movie. In an updated and non-sexist fashion, we have all the archetypes: the incompetent colonel in charge, the cool-headed killing machine (in this case, a tough Latino woman named Vasquez who says, "Look, man, I need to know only one thing: where they are!"), and a high-strung "kid" ready to crack. There's also some of the same kind of humor, with a lot of bantering and one-upmanship that had the audience laughing. Helmets are strapped on, guns loaded, and forces deployed to get these mothers.

And while there's suspense, tension, and definite edge-of-your-seat excitement, there's not the same kind of horror found in the first film. We

know what the alien is now. We can't be scared the same way. But we'd sure like to see someone deal with a football squad of the creatures.

So, it's the weapons that are all-important. Jim Cameron designed the weaponry by modifying existing guns and projecting what they might be with futuristic firepower. There are smart-guns, based on a Spandau-type machine gun (a real workhorse of a weapon), and a pulse gun, built out of a Thompson machine gun merged with a pump-action shotgun. And all the guns work.

"They fire blanks," Hurd told me, "but they were certainly capable of being used conventionally as well. In fact, I think the Defense Department will be quite interested."

They are extremely effective against the aliens. The film is filled with shots of exploding aliens, screaming out their frustrated agony, as the Marines send their carapaces and acidic vital fluids flying. The aliens are as eager as ever, but, in this case, good old American firepower has them outmatched.

Except for the queen alien. The queen quite simply claims the title as best-designed creature in a film, ever. It is a staggering monster, and absolutely convincing in its movements.

"It is definitely the same species," Stan Winston said. "You would know it's the same species, but it's totally different. I mean, we are talking about a 14-foot monster that was operated by a combination of two people inside, puppeteers, using articulated arms, hydraulically controlled body, neck, and head movement, and radio-controlled facial movement. Every state-of-the-art technique was used in the actual building and operation of the queen, and she works beautifully in every way."

Robert Skotak also worked with the

queen. "We did a miniature version of it which is activated with cables and rods. I basically continued the footage that live action started with." Looking at the film, it's impossible to see where the miniature was used. "The great portion of the effects in the film was meant not to be recognized as effects, to be invisible."

The queen is definitely a different kind of alien.

Watching her, Ripley senses an awareness, and then the creature seems to flaunt its power. We see a huge, membranous egg-laying sheath that protrudes from the queen as she squeezes out eggs the size of a La-Z-boy recliner.

When Ripley flees, the queen, in a perhaps incongruous moment, uses a large elevator to follow her. But underlying the whole pursuit is the delicious sense that this mama alien will do anything to protect her voracious young.

The final confrontation is best left seen than described, except to say that the power-loader is an amusing touch. "The power-loader is," Hurd told me, "essentially a forklift that you wear." When Ripley straps it on, with its huge grabbing claws, everyone moves another inch farther in his seat, ready for one hell of a fight.

There are a few disappointing moments. A cyborg, an artificial human, is on board and loses its body much like the one in the first film. The scenes with Newt, the young girl, ring false. But, more importantly, H. R. Giger's superb monster has become a diminished creature. There may be more of them, but they get blown apart rather quickly. There's also a company man on board, as in the first film, who wants to bring one of these monstrosities back alive.

There are some quick references to

other films. For contrast, a bit of modern music used in 2001 reminds us that this encounter will be of a less cosmic nature. The aliens cut the power, and for a few moments we're in Howard Hawk's landmark classic *The Thing*. And, of course, there's another big eating scene that recalls the first film's most gruesome moment.

*Aliens* stands on its own as a film. It's a breathtaking roller coaster, featuring the cinematic rematch of the decade. And just when the situation looks hopeless, really hopeless, we see a credible, last-minute rescue that makes us smile in relief.

It's over. We sigh, relax, get ready for the end credits.

It took Alfred Hitchcock to show us a true monster, and it wasn't anything from "out there." No, the real monsters of this life were just ordinary-looking people who just happened to do terrible things to nice people.

People like Norman Bates, for example. Norman was the prototype for the post-50s sicko, the mental case who grabs headlines and gets books written about him. Some people like to read about bizarre murders, and some like to see movies about them. And a few actually commit them.

The few real monsters.

But even before *Psycho* and Norman (who's still in the motel business, apparently), there were other treatments of the man-as-a-monster motif, most dished out with scientific experiments, with powerful radiation, or with unpredictable drugs. One of the earliest versions was the first *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (circa 1908, lasting all of 16 minutes). One of the best was 1958's *The Fly*.

*The Fly*, starring Vincent Price, was one of the most famous and expensive transformation movies. It featured a



script by James Clavell, who later went on to write and direct *Shogun*. It was also the last film by Kurt Neumann, who directed *Rocketship X-M*, an early 1950's trip to an inhabited Mars.

David Hedison played a scientist who experimented with his own electronic creation, a matter transmitter, and found that he had the head and wings of a fly, and, well, vice versa.

While an exciting film, with the man-fly going mad with frustration as he tries to change back to his original human form, it's the very end of the film that most people recall. The fly, with its tiny human head, gets trapped in a spider web as a fat spider bears down on him. The fly shouts, as best as it can, up at the scientist's brother, played by Price. "Help me!" it squeals with a tiny sound (and image) that makes the skin crawl. And Price summarily smashes a rock down on the screaming insect, mercifully sparing it from the spider's mandibles.

A haunting ending, one that inspired Stuart Cornfeld, producer of the new film, *The Fly*. He spent two years developing *The Fly*, and post-production work was still going on when I talked to him.

"In our version," he told me, "the scientist (Jeff Goldblum) gets in, and the audience sees that there's a fly in there with him. He pops out the other end, and he's completely normal. But there's no fly."

And where, you ask, is the fly?

Cornfeld explained. "What's involved is that his body has absorbed the fly. So, it's more a story of metamorphosis. It's gradual, but it accelerates as time goes on."

In this film, Jeff Goldblum, who's appeared in the remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and the cult-favorite *Buckaroo Banzai*, portrays the scien-

tist. Geena Davis is his girl friend, a journalist, who gets to see her lover change.

Chris Walas, veteran of *Gremlins* and *Enemy Mine*, was responsible for the makeup effects which, Cornfeld said, included, "Six different stages of metamorphosis, the last two of which are really bizarre." The final stages included some mechanical effects also created by Walas.

There are no werewolf-type transformations, sudden changes by the scientist. "There are," Cornfeld said, "some time-lapse situations where we cut to another scene and then come back. But it's a linear change. It's not like he turns into something, and then turns back."

David Cronenberg, director of *The Fly*, has become something of a horror specialist, with films like *Scanners*, *The Brood*, and the more sedate film, *The Dead Zone*. He talked of a special affinity for *The Fly*.

"When I read the script, I was really impressed because it was a complete reconceptualization of the basic premise of the original."

The 1958 version had also left its mark on Cronenberg. "At the time, there was a \$500 reward if you could prove that the transference of heads between the man and the fly couldn't happen. Well, it was never explained how the heads changed sizes, and that always bothered me as a kid. Where did all the extra molecules and atoms come from to make a big fly head as opposed to a normal-sized fly head? Really, if they exchanged heads, there should be a tiny fly head on a big human body."

Cronenberg's new version will solve that particular dilemma. "Part of the rethink of this version takes care of that objection," he pointed out. "When the man and the fly are trans-

mitted from one booth to the other, the fly has disappeared and the man is all right. There has been a genetic fusion, and gradually the man is transformed into a fly."

And so, we lose that famous last shot: the tiny human face, the high-pitched screaming, the rock crashing down.

But then, that image couldn't be improved upon, could it? It's perfect. And let's just be happy that we seem

to be going through a second golden era — a second wave, if you will — of malevolent aliens and of scientists going too far, all, hopefully, giving a new generation of kids their own pulpish nightmares.

Now (sigh), if we could just get real butter back on our popcorn, gray-haired matrons wearing white shoes, and 25-cent matinees.

Yes, then all would be truly right with the world.



## Kleinism

A happy executive is a useless individual.

— Professor Arthur L. Klein (1898-1983)

# THROUGH TIME & SPACE WITH FERDINAND FEGHOOT ①

By Grendel Briarton  
art: Tim Kirk

*Ferdinand Feghoot has been traveling across space and time for . . . well, for quite some time now. And between the various adventures of his life's saga, he, along with his biographer, Mr. Briarton, still finds a moment to drop by our editorial office to discuss the nature of cats.*

*Ferdinand's exploits have been recorded by Mr. Briarton in *The Compleat Feghoot*, published by Mirage Press (1980), and still in print.*



It would be impossible to overestimate Ferdinand Feghoot's influence on the late 20th-century's serious literature. As an example, when Philip Roth wrote his monumental autobiography in the 1990s, it was to Feghoot that his publisher went for advice on its title.

"Ferdinand," he said almost hysterically, "poor Philip has poured his soul into this book. It tells his trials and adversities, his disappointments and inadequacies, his most painful embarrassments, his despairs, all his mental and physical sufferings. It is tremendously moving and immensely profound, yet we know that without a suitable title it may not succeed. When he wrote *Portnoy's Complaint*, we had no trouble at all. I think it's because the title itself aroused the sympathy of the book buyers."

"That may be part of it," Feghoot replied, "but don't forget — a title must also have that ineffable *something* that tells you instantly it's going to be a best seller."

"I know," groaned the unhappy publisher, "but *what?* We've been getting *nowhere*. Please, say you can help us!"

"My dear fellow, it's simple," said Ferdinand Feghoot. "Just call it *The Gripes of Roth*."





**LIGHT FANTASTIC**  
by Eluki bes Shahr  
art: Larry Elmore

*Our March 1985 issue led off with "Hellflower," Eluki bes Shahar's first professional sale. It introduced Butterfly St. Cyr, whom one story could not possibly contain and who reappears herewith in a story that is, however, self-contained.*

I was minding my own business in a low dive on Manticore, killing time and being strictly left alone despite my pretty green eyes. The reason was the big blue spider the alMayne GreatHouse Chernbereth-Molkath had tattooed on my forehead, souvenir of my too-long on alMayne while *Firecat* ate overhead in an outhostel dock.

If I hadn't been so broke — being adopted into a Hellflower GreatHouse's a signal honor but the pay's lousy — I wouldn't be lifting today for the Roaq with a load of very illegal veggies — a little transaction between my boss Oob the Tusk and his sector-lieutenant, Vannet. Y'see, the Imperial Governor General, Mallorum Archangel, was visiting Roaq in a few days, and the security that would drop with his visit was nothing I wanted to be close to. I owe my long and glorious career to never having been audited by ImpSec. It's guaranteed unhealthy for my favorite red-haired girl and other living things.

On the other hand, for the next four weeks Roaq was going to be a boom market for chobosh. And as I said, I was broke.

That would teach me to stop rescuing pretty alMayne children off the street.

The citizen coming in the front door was no child, and nicely designed to make me wish I had longer to stay. He looked fairly close to my home B-Pop; more to the point, he was gorgeous, with wavy hair and a sinful way of filling his superskin jeans. High-class merchandise, for sure, and he didn't dress like any member of the Gentry that had to hump for a living. Rings on his fingers and bells on his boots and wicked, wicked eyes.

The dream walking got to the bottom of the steps and turned my way.

"Hey, Errol!" someone called. "Never thought we'd see you again! You mean that *Lady-ship* a' yours's still in one piece?"

In a properly run universe I would have recognized him the moment he walked in the door. The 'tender would'a dove for cover, everybody would'a gotten outta the way and the band would'a headed for the next planet. "You!" he would gasp. "Not *you!*"

And then . . . It was a sweet scenario that used to keep me warm at night. I knew every move and word by heart. I stood up and took a deep breath.

Errol Lightfoot walked past me without a second glance, a vision in tight gleaming jeans. He waved cheerily at the scoffer and took a booth in the back.

Eventually I sat down again and shut my mouth. Even more eventually I decided that I might as well finish my drink and get out of there. Pick up my

cargo and off to the Roaq, and Errol and I could remain mutually oblivious for another twenty years.

Oh, once upon a time and a hundred thousand years ago, when I'd been young and foolish, I'd spent serious time and money looking for Errol. Then I'd spent equally serious effort staying out of his way.

Since I was now neither young nor foolish, of course, I was going to leave quietly. It was the only sensible, mature, logical thing to do.

I picked up what was left of my drink and walked over to Errol's booth.

"Hiya, hotshot," I said. "Remember me?"

Those wicked-wicked eyes took the scenic route and finally stopped at my face.

"Darling!" said Errol delightedly. "Of *course* I remember! *Do* sit down! How have you *been?*"

I stared at him. I'd always thought Errol was much, much older than I was. Also that he was suave, sophisticated, a man of the galaxy.

"— it was wonderful!" he burred on.

I'd been fourteen, and an idiot. He'd been twenty-two.

"That wonderful moonlit —"

It had been broad daylight. He'd landed in our cornfield. I was a dirt-sider's daughter. I'd never seen anything like him.

"— week?"

Six weeks, and the finale was a killer, trust me.

"Now, *don't* tell me, darling, I remember everything perfectly," he continued, blissfully oblivious to the past flashing before my eyes.

So did I. He'd taken off again with several hundred of my dirt-dumb fellow citizens in cold storage — and me in the captain's bed. It'd all been my idea at the time.

"— oh, now *darling*, don't take on like that, you know I never actually promised to marry you —"

No, just the suns, the moons, and the planets; thrills, chills, romance, excitement, and the freedom of infinite space. That was before we got to Market Garden and he sold his cargo on the block as slaves. Including me.

I told you I was fourteen and an idiot.

At this point I managed to regiment my wandering brain cells. "You *are* Errol Lightfoot, aren't you? Captain of the *Light Lady?*"

He began to look worried. "I don't know what they told you, sweetheart, but —"

"Errol, what's my name?"

Errol looked at me. "Don't you know?" he asked. "It's shocking what people will fob off as good liquor nowadays. *Do* sit down, darling — I'm sure it will come back to you sooner or later."

I sat down.

"We must have a drink to celebrate. Innkeeper! What are you drinking, darling?"

"Ethyl alcohol. Straight up, with a cyanide chaser."

I drank steadily while Errol told me the current story of his life. Errol, said Errol, rarely came to Manticore, but just between him and me and the rest of the bar he'd had a chance to buy up a load of chobosh real cheap, and everyone knew that some people would pay top credit for chobosh, so —

Eventually I staggered to my feet and headed back to my Docking Bay. Errol was desolated to hear I couldn't stay. Errol had plans for us, and for the evening, and they were the *very same* plans, and wasn't that the most wonderful coincidence?

Errol was easily mistaken for a brainburn case, but he was still alive after twenty years, which argued one of two things: real smarts or the luck of the devil.

The jury was still out on that one.

It wasn't until I was in the nice cool Docking Bay that I was afflicted by a severe case of Divine Revelation. Errol was on Manticore because —

Divine Revelation's a great cure for brain-fry. I dashed over to the pressure seal door between my bay and the next one and yanked it open.

I was right.

There was my lovely, marketable, illegal chobosh, all boxed up and loaded on a handtruck.

And there was the ship it had been taken off.

I went over to the ship. Clue number one: it had one of the gaudier paint jobs of this or any other system. Clue number two: it was a flying accident looking for a place to happen. I rubbed a patch of hull near the rusting loading cranes clean and could practically read the name glazed into the plates.

Clue number three: she was named the *Light Lady*. All Errol Lightfoot's ships were called *Light Lady*. This must be Errol's ship.

"This," I told the load of chobosh, "must be Errol's ship."

The chobosh refused to discuss the matter. I gave up talking to the cargo and hustled the handtruck back through the door. Damn. Damn. Damn if I hadn't seen him in the bar I would never have thought to check the ship. I didn't need to know this.

I knocked on the side of *Firecat*. "It's me, Pally," I said to the ambient air and the ramp lowered.

Paladin is my supposedly silent partner, and the brains of the *Firecat* — he's a navicomp, and a library, and a holovid. But what he really is, is a fully volitional logic — an artificial mind — and there are times when I think he's smarter than I am. He's certainly more in demand. Volitional logics were banned back when the Empire was a Federation, about a thousand years ago.

"Hello, Butterfly," Pally said.

"What have you got to sound so cheerful about?" I demanded. "My life is in ashes and this godlost aerosledge won't go through the hatch."



"You've been drinking," Paladin said primly. "And the hatch is too narrow. You'll have to load it by hand."

If there's anything I can't stand it's a smug volitional logic. He was right too. So I loaded the godlost chobosh by hand, keeping up a running commentary of my opinions on the day so far. And just for toppers, the chobosh, which would've fit in *Light Lady's* broom closet, was barely going to leave me room to stand up. It was also packed in too-damn-many little cartons and it took t' Hell 'n gone to load.

"Why is your life in ashes, Butterfly?" Paladin asked as I was finally tying down the nets over the cargo.

I sat down in the hatch. "Because Errol damn-him Lightfoot just walked back into it, baby buddy, and when I get my hands on him —"

"Butterfly, you swore you weren't going to do this," said Paladin warningly.

"— I'm going to —"

"You said after the last time that it didn't matter how pretty they were, you weren't going to —"

"That was different, Pally. Trust me."

"But Butterfly, you always say that."

"Well, this time it's true, damn it! Do you have any idea who Errol Lightfoot is?"

There was a brief silence. "Errol Lightfoot," Paladin began reciting, "is a forty-two-year-old Fenshee male, approximately 1.86 meters in height and massing 78.18 kilos. So far it doesn't sound any different to me, Butterfly."

"As long as you're reading his Captain's papers from the Portmaster's office, read the rest of it." You never knew what tidbit would be useful later. "And quit trying to be funny."

"He is rated," said Paladin stiffly, "on all sub-light and all sub-Main standard ships up to 500,000 kilos. His last port was Royal, in the Tortuga Sector. Oh, the Portmaster's added a note here. The Brightlaw Corporation currently has a Class Three reward offered for him."

That was my boy Errol, always making new friends everywhere he went.

"So why is this different, Butterfly?" Paladin continued inexorably.

I stared at my boots while Paladin waited patiently. Finally I stood up and stretched. "You know why this is different, Pally? Because Errol Lightfoot is R'rh-coked trouble. And you know something else, little buddy? This time I'm going to use some smarts and leave that gorgeous hunk of egotism to work out his own problems. Maybe the Portmaster'll turn him in for the reward. Maybe that flying disaster of his will fall over on him."

"Are you all right?" asked Paladin.

"I'm fine. I just realized that I'm not fourteen any more and I'm not an idiot any more."

"Oh, good," said my ever-helpful companion happily. Sometimes I wonder about Pally.

"Someone or something else can off the boy wonder. This time I'm going to mind my own business and stay out of trouble —"

At that moment Errol Lightfoot came charging down the entrance ramp to the bay, guns at the ready. He didn't know who I was, but he sure knew what I'd done.

"Hey!" he yelled indignantly. "That's my cargo!"

"And my name is Butterflies-are-free Peace Sincere!" I yelled back, and ducked inside as he got off his first shot.

I heard Paladin start a preflight clearance and call Manticore Space Central for a window. I dogged down the hatch and dove for the cockpit through six million little boxes of chobosh that were probably going to be deducted from my fee for damages. I heard shots ricocheting off the hull.

"Pally, get us out of here!" Three of the engines cycled on-line as I vaulted into the mercy seat and we started to move. The cockpit was dark except for the opsimpac; it told me where the bay access was and that it was clear, which was too bad. I'd sort'a hoped to run *Firecat* over Errol, just for old times' sake.

The bubble canopy dropped into flight position while I was explaining to Central that they *had* given me clearance, so what did they care if I took early advantage of it? I figured I was safe from pursuit; it takes time to cold-start a ship much larger than *Firecat* and even so I was skating real close to the edge.

Manticore spread out below me, getting rounder the higher I went. I didn't stop to admire the view.

Space Central was still scolding me, promising murder and imprisonment and fines, when abruptly the techie said a nasty word that wasn't in the official handbook and I looked around real quick.

*Light Lady* was grabbing sky like a homesick angel and heading right for me. I poured on the go-devils and checked my readings. There was no way I was going to make the Jump this deep in Manticore's gravity well. I cut the commo circuit — I didn't want to hear from Errol — and powered up my belly-gun, all the while loudly demanding of the galaxy's assorted deities how he'd gotten that ship to take off instead of taking half the port with it to no return.

"I don't know," said Paladin brightly.

Real helpful. As long as They were making fully-vol logics, why didn't they program them to do something really useful, like worry?

He was still gaining on me but he was below me. If I could keep him there, I could hit Transfer Point and Jump first, and ride angels to Roaq free and clear.

I checked my numbers again and still didn't get any news I liked.

"Paladin," I said, "you don't love me."

He knew better than to comment.

I ranged my belly-gun and it made some discouraging remarks to the

*Lady*. She replied in kind and louder. I hoped Errol wanted his cargo badly enough not to blow it out of reality, but apparently he didn't mind denting it a bit. And he had power to spare — I didn't.

The proximity alarms for Transfer Point finally went off and I decided better too soon than never. The next time Errol fired at me I put *Firecat* end-over-end like he'd taken out one of her stabilizers. When he dropped back to avoid a collision I jumped.

It's nice and quiet at angels.

"Damage?" I asked.

"You'll have to repaint. And he took out my port-rear eyes. But we didn't take any direct hits; we can put off the repairs until we get home."

"Good enough," I told him. I'd have to restow the chobosh and come up with a good story for Oob's buddy Vannet so I didn't have to pay spoilage, but other than that the next three days would be silk sailing. Pally could help me forge a new registry. It was one of his favorite hobbies.

"Butterfly?" said Paladin. "When do we start staying out of trouble?"

If I was lucky, Errol was too busy avoiding his clients to worry about me. All I wanted to do was drop my cargo and get off Roaq before any of the Imperial Governor General's minions took an interest in me.

Realspace was black all around, and I called Roaq Approach to get a lane while I was telling Paladin to hook me up with Vannet. I wanted that chobosh off my ship and my money in my hand before the horizon went up. Let someone else play games with the TwiceBorn.

I kept the channel open after acknowledging Roaq Approach. I believe in taking a healthy interest in current events. But it sure looked like I'd aced this one real sweet.

"Trouble, Cap'n!" Paladin sang out right on cue just as they started holering at an unidentified freighter behind me to get out of my lane. I spun *Firecat* on her axis and eyeballed him, but I already knew what I'd see.

Errol.

I didn't waste any time wondering silly, girlish things like how he'd tracked me. I jumped my approach lane and tried to get sun-up, but this time he wasn't worried about his precious cargo. His shots were on-the-money. And I was out a set of front deflectors.

I split my power between the rear bumpers and the plasma cannon and missed the *Light Lady* a couple of times.

This was not working out precisely like I'd planned.

"Tell Vannet we got trouble, Pally."

"Okay, boss," he said placidly.

I was running out of sky, and Roaq was coming after me like an overdue port fees bill.

I dropped *Firecat* like a hot rock through atmosphere all the way down into the air traffic lanes. Let Errol follow me through that if he wanted his

chobosh that bad. Correction: *my* chobosh. I ducked again and was down at theoretical treetop level, the only kind Roaq had. I headed out for open desert.

"Well?" I demanded.

"He's still there." Hell. "Oncoming," Paladin added.

Heading right for me were two cyber-freighters making an alternate approach to the port. I targeted on one of them, slid the length of it on *Firecat*'s belly and went straight up through the flare. The engine exhaust blanked sensors as I scrambled for the high ground. The sky went from pink to black as we left atmosphere and I didn't see Errol anywhere. Now I could figure how to get back and land Vannet's damn chobosh.

He came diving on me right out of the Primary, turbos blazing bright as a cliché. I angled the bumpers I had left but he came in right over them and left me about as much control over the ship as I had over galactic government. I blinked sundogs out of my eyes and tried to turn her, but she was damnall slow.

The ship rocked as I was hit again.

"You give up?" said the commo.

"You go to Hell," I told him and shut it off. Roaq was coming round again. I tried to pull *Firecat* into a nice high orbit.

*Light Lady* hit us last licks, just for luck.

"Primary impellers gone, secondary impellers gone, port-and-starboard attitude jets jammed," Paladin chanted. "Para-light systems gone, lifters jammed —"

We were not going into a nice high orbit.

"— para-gravity systems stripped, weapons system inoperative, heat-exchangers overloaded —"

I already knew that. Another few degrees and that damned chobosh was going to be stir-fry.

"— front and rear deflectors gone —"

We were back in atmosphere and *Firecat* started to glow.

"Damn it, Pally, doesn't anything *work*?"

"Commo gear — Vannet knows where you're going down. He's sending a team. Port-and-starboard deflectors, nose jets, and the tail-docking grapnel. And the hatch mechanism. And me."

"Terrific." My sensor suite was gone but the in-hull sensors were still intact and I could eyeball the *Lady* following me down. It was some compensation to imagine the look on Errol's face as he realized his precious cargo was about to become ashes over Roaq City, but not much.

I skimmed over the desert like a bat out of luck, wrapped the leftover deflectors around *Firecat* as far as they would go and started some serious plea-bargaining for a decent afterlife. Paladin was going on about how the doubletalk generators were fused and the widget interlocks were frozen and the veeblefetzer had fallen off some time back, but I didn't pay any attention.

"Hold together, you nasty-tempered piece of candy," I prayed.

"Butterfly —" Paladin sounded worried. Finally. I could die a happy woman. "Butterfly, you do have an idea, don't you?"

"Drop anchor, Pally," I told him, and grabbed the arms of my chair.

The docking grapnel shot out, bit into the desert, and held. I heard a rumble as the chobosh broke loose again.

The cable held for an instant and then parted with a ringing sound just as I keyed all the remaining jets on full.

My Best Girl tried to stand on her nose, came up off the nose-jets indignantly, and smacked her tail into the sand. The cockpit slammed back into the hold when *Firecat* bellied, the sensors dumped memory, and I sat there in the dark listening to sand remove my hull as we skidded across the desert for a few minutes of high-speed adventure.

Then we stopped.

"I'm going to kill that son of a bitch."

"Butterfly?"

"It's not bad enough he breaks quarantine and lands in our cornfield."

"Butterfly?"

"And talks the village elders into letting him lead a crusade."

"Are you feeling all right?"

"Or —"

"Butterfly!"

"S'matter, Pally, don't you like crusades?"

He decided to ignore this. "Butterfly, where are we?"

That got my attention. "Why ask me? You're the one with the sensor-pac."

"I *was* the one with the sensor-pac. And boy, do you need to repaint."

"Yeah." Everything hurt as I dragged my fair young bod out of the mercy seat. Some of the chobosh was crushed, and the smell made me dizzy.

I pulled the manual release and the hatch blew off, leaving me looking at a whole lot of Roaq's desert, livened only by the interesting sight of the *Light Lady* parked right next door. She didn't look any more trustworthy in broad daylight. Errol, wearing jeans even tighter than the last pair I'd seen him in, was lounging against one of the landing struts. The sight of him aroused primitive and uncontrollable urges in my far-from-maiden breast.

I stepped carefully out of my ship. The *Lady's* slaved cannon turned in my direction. Wonderful. Slaved cannon were faster than anything human and could be keyed to blow me away if I moved too fast. I moved cautiously toward Errol.

"Darling!" he sang out happily, "what a marvelous landing! I admit that at first I didn't think you'd be able to do it, but then I said to myself, 'Errol, m'lad, this is a woman who managed to remember her own name after drinking on Manticore all afternoon. She is surely capable of —' "

By then I was close enough to punch Errol Lightfoot in the face.

He wasn't expecting that. He hit the hull of his ship going away and I followed him down to finish it.

The *Lady's* first blast just missed me. I heard the guns track to the end of their traverse, lay over with a grating sound that spoke volumes for Errol's lousy maintenance, and then track back the other way.

Errol, with his usual brilliance, had programmed his ship to shoot *anything* that moved fast enough.

Including him.

"Errol Lightfoot you IDIOT!" I yelled, and tried to kick him.

I didn't have any more time to reason things out, 'cause Errol was taller'n me, and heavier, and had been in a lot more hooch-arcade-and-cantina brawls. I couldn't get to my blasters, and the only safe place to be within a couple of square continents was directly under Errol's ship.

Finally the cannon stopped looking for something to shoot.

"That's the stupidest thing I've ever seen in my entire life!" I panted.

Errol grinned down. "Stupider than trying to land a ship without power in the middle of a desert?"

I tried to bite him but he wasn't having any and I was out of breath anyway.

"Let me up," I said, having run out of things to think.

Errol smiled sunnily and rolled away. "Now that that's settled, I know we'll have so many things to share with each other. If you touch those blasters, I *will* shoot you."

I stopped sliding over to the weaponry I'd lost in the recent unpleasantness and wiped blood off my chin instead.

"I'm sure there are knives as well," Errol observed politely.

I came up with two inert-blade throwing knives, the vibro I wear in my boot, and, as proof of good intentions, a couple of grenades.

The boy wonder of the spaceways regarded the pile with mock amazement and a commendable steadiness of purpose. "Why Butterflies-are-free Peace Sincere, what a dangerous person you are!"

I didn't say anything.

"I'm certain I should remember someone as dangerous as you are. Tell me —"

"I'm not here to play Twenty Questions."

"— just what possessed you to run off with my cargo that way?"

"Can you think of a better way to run off with it? And while we're on the subject of possession, it's my cargo. I've got a manifest and a buyer."

"You'll need it. You haven't got a ship."

"I did before you ran me into the side of a planet! What makes you —"

"There are two schools of thought regarding that," said Errol blandly, getting to his feet and pulling me with him. "The Predestinators hold that you would have made a lousy landing anyway, and the Free Willers hold that if you don't want to even more closely resemble your ship you're going

to unload her right now so I can be off. If you're a good girl, I'll take you with me."

Again?

"You don't really think this is going to work?" I asked.

"I'm armed," said Errol sweetly.

The *Lady's* proximity sensors blipped and Errol spun around.

"Not in a battle of wits," I told him. There was a land-yacht heading towards us and it was one of Vannet's. I leaned against the hull of Errol's *Lady* and did some grinning of my own.

One of the advantages of being an independent contractor rather than a freelancer like Errol is that the folks you sell your services to on an exclusive basis have an interest in seeing that you continue to do so.

Case in point: It may have taken an uncomfortable while to find us, but Vannet's headhunters were coming over the rise to make sure I got what was rightfully Errol's. They laid down a nice covering fire to keep him from getting back aboard the *Lady*. I stayed safely out of the way as he retreated into *Firecat*. Too bad Paladin's intruder systems weren't working, or we could have handed Errol over giftwrapped.

And the best part was that I could now claim any and all damage to the chobosh was his fault and not mine.

Headhunter leader, Vannet's pet werewolf Olione, finally got religion and used a riot-gas grenade. No one can say that Vannet doesn't give his sideboys every little bennie. When Errol came tumbling out Olione's heavies grabbed him. He wasn't hurt. Yet.

Olione turned to me. "Who is this man?"

"A Fenshee freelancer, Errol Lightfoot, who used to be in the chobosh business."

"You brought him here," Olione said flatly.

"He followed me through hyperspace."

"That's impossible."

I shrugged. I thought it was too, but never mind that now. "Suit yourself. Maybe you know some reason I'd want to bring him with?"

"No." But Olione's hand dropped to where good little headhunters keep their heat, and for just an instant I thought it was the end of my favorite Free Trader. Then his eyes flickered up and he stopped.

I promised to spin a prayer wheel for my baby blond alMayne benefactor, the 750,000 members of Chernbereth-Molkath, and the advertising budget that enabled a disinterested mental lightweight like Olione to recognize an alMayne castemark and the consequences of tampering with the castemark's wearer.

"You go ahead with Lightfoot, Olione. Tell Vannet I'll be bringing in your cargo Real Soon Now."

"We can send a transport for your cargo, Captain St. Cyr. Your ship is obviously disabled."

"Correction — *one* of my ships is unable to fly." I watched Errol out of the corner of my eye, hoping I could count on him to finish distracting Olione. "The other, as you can see . . ." I gestured at the *Light Lady*.

Errol attempted to climb through Headhunter Number One and get at me. "You *tricked* me!" He got a gun-butt on the back of the head, then they dropped him in the back of the yacht.

"There is a lot of that going around," I said.

Errol's next stop'd be Vannet's hardsite, for interrogation and a trouncing before they turned him loose. It'd happened to me often enough when I was young and foolish. At least it had distracted Olione from his clever idea of saving Vannet my transport fee.

"You are claiming the Fenshee ship?" he asked.

"It's mine by right of salvage. You can tell Vannet that. I'll put the chobosh aboard and bring it in."

"Shall I leave you a co-pilot?"

I was really getting tired of all these attempts to knock me off on sunny Roaq, and they were damn silly too. Good darktrade 'leggers are hard to replace.

"No."

"As you wish." Olione bundled his disappointed goons and various odds and ends into his flashy bus and left.

I watched them go. I figured I was safe until I put down in RoaqPort, and went over to take another look at *Firecat*. She stank of riot gas, but she wasn't any worse off than she'd been after the landing.

"Paladin," I said, "do you think I'm difficult to get along with?"

"Not when you get your own way. What happened?"

"Vannet's heat showed up and bagged Fensha's gift to the pre-nubile. Funny thing was, Olione was going to shoot me and take the chobosh too. Why?"

"Olione doesn't like you?"

"Olione is Vannet's hardboy and does what he's told."

"Vannet doesn't like you?"

"Ditto, except Oob holds the leash."

"Oob doesn't like you."

This had to be considered, but not very hard. "Oob likes money and I'm lucrative. Anybody starts shooting 'leggers, he won't be able to get an Indie to herd skyjunk for him, let alone one of the Gentry." I sighed and rubbed the back of my neck. "We gonna fly again, Pally?"

"Hull's sound. Drive's slag and the sensors are junk. You tell me."

"Um," I said. The only light in *Firecat* came from the daylight outside, and that wasn't much. "When is the Governor General due?"

"Twenty hours from now — local tomorrow."

By then I had to be off the planet somehow.

"There's Errol's ship," Paladin suggested tentatively.



"I wouldn't take that flying coffin out of atmosphere for the Phoenix Throne giftwrapped. Do you know what the great Captain Lightfoot's idea of hyperdrive maintenance is? A new paint job, that's what it is! He must have had twenty damn ships called *Light Lady*, and do you know why? *Because they all fall apart, that's why!*"

"You're raising your voice," Paladin observed dispassionately. Then he said, "What's wrong, Butterfly?"

Sometimes I forget that just because I can't see Paladin (except for a black-box under the mercy seat) doesn't mean that he can't see me. "Nothing's wrong, Pally. I knew Errol a long time ago, and he doesn't remember anything about it. That's all." It was the truth, as far as it went.

"Oh." Paladin sounded dubious. "Do you like him very much, Butterfly?"

"If I ever get my hands on him again I'm going to strangle him with his own damn moustache."

"Oh. That's all right then."

Sometimes I wonder how much Paladin really understands about humans.

RoaqPort wasn't going to come to us, no matter how much I wanted it to, so I figured I'd better unship Pally so he could see about getting *Light Lady* into some kind of state to fly. After a little scuffling I found my tools and got the pilot's seat out of the cockpit well, but that was as far as it went. Paladin was wedged in well and truly and I bent a pry-bar and the rest of my temper out of shape before I gave up.

"Babe, you're stuck."

"Stuck?" Paladin sounded outraged. "That's impossible."

"Believe it or don't. Unless Errol's got a plasma torch in his map case, you and *Firecat* are one flesh until I can get her into Port."

"I don't like that," Paladin said flatly.

Well, Errol didn't have a plasma torch, and the *Lady's* cockpit was locked. It'd be no trouble to break in, but the primary ignition was sure to be threaded through the computer. I could spend the rest of my life trying to break that code.

On the other hand, what's the use of having friends if you can't exploit them once in a while? I ran a cable between *Light Lady's* computer and Paladin and let him play games while I moved one hundred and forty-four cartons of chobosh (less twenty percent for damage and spoilage) back into the *Lady*.

One of the many things Errol didn't have was a hand truck.

Finally it was all aboard — again. I put salvage beacons all around *Firecat* and went in to tell Paladin good-bye.

"Well," I said.

"You'll be careful, Butterfly? You won't get into trouble, or take chances,

or go rescuing anyone like you did that last time?"

"There aren't any hellflower glitterborn on Roaq."

"That's not what I meant."

"I'll be good, Pally. If there's a freighter tapping the Mains with a hold big enough to take us, we'll be on it before Archangel hit angels for Roaq."

"What about Errol?" Paladin sounded downright suspicious.

"Errol can take his own chances."

So I boarded Errol's *Lady* and got to work. She was about six times bigger than *Firecat*, but I could fly her. I woke up the main board, fed power to the para-gravity systems, and eased back on the throttles with my right hand while I goosed the lifters with my left. All the gauges read either too low or too high. A sweet unanimity of feeling so lacking in the modern galaxy.

After a great deal of shuddering she raised, and I said another prayer to the Maker-of-Starships not to let this one go splat. I had to use more power than I liked to make the hull plating snap down, and *Lady* resented it. *Firecat* wasn't the only one needing new shoes.

And that gave me an unwholesome idea.

RoaqPort didn't twig to the fact that I'd just come from downside — me not having been born yesterday — and they didn't know that little me was the same freighter that had given them such grief earlier. They seemed a little surprised when I requested a Class Double-A berth, but they had an empty one and soon enough I was in it.

Some kiddy from the Portmaster's office met me at the dock with oh-so-polite inquiries. He damn near died when he saw what I'd parked in his AA slip, and I don't think he believed a word of the story I told him, which wasn't surprising since I didn't believe it myself.

He did understand when I told him to flush and charge all her systems, synchronize her drives, tune the come-hithers, lay in a supply of high-ticket munchies, and deep-clean the exterior. Spare no expense.

He brightened right up at that — I'm sure he hoped to get my heart's delight to match the walls of his immaculate luxury berth before he claimed her in default of overdue port fees. I showed him my captain's papers and they were all in order, which was a miracle of Pally's device, and we discussed my taking out a crew to pick up *Firecat* and put her in a rack at the Port. I told him he could leave my supplies at the foot of the ramp and shoed him off.

And waited.

I was just about to either call home and mother or see if Errol had left me anything more appetizing than surplus Imperial Emergency Rations in the galley when this unfamiliar slimy-looking little coward about half my size sidled up to me, keeping one eye on the ship.

"You Butterfly St. Cyr?" he demanded in a breathy whisper.

"I'm *Captain* St. Cyr. What do you want?" I didn't like him already and I'd never seen him before. Maybe it was his garish taste in shirts.

"Vannet sent me for your cargo."

This was not going to be the beginning of a beautiful friendship. "Sure. Wait right there and don't move. If you move, I blow you away."

Double-A berths have all the perks. I got a land-line and punched up Vannet's code. Olione answered.

"This is *Firecat*. There is a small ugly person here that says he's from Vannet for the cargo. I don't recognize him. Did you send him?"

"What's his name?"

"What's your name, small, ugly, and alive-for-the-moment person?"

"Loritsch."

"Loritsch."

"He's all right," said Olione, which struck me as lousy security but that was his business. He might have wanted to say more, but I cut the line on him. Lots of new faces around Vannet these days, and all lizard, something Oob wouldn't encourage.

"Okay," I told Loritsch. "Take your cargo. You can load it yourself. And start now."

He gave me a look that promised wonders and came back in a few minutes with two goons and a hand truck. They took it into the hold and I followed to make sure they treated my new-found property with the proper respect.

Loritsch didn't kick about the damaged chobosh, which struck me funny at the time. The hand truck and the chobosh and the muscle went back down the ramp. Loritsch prepared to follow. I grabbed him by a collar that was lurid enough to bite back.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" I asked sweetly. He played stupid. "The receipt," I prompted. "Without a ticket-of-leave I don't get paid."

"Don't know anything about a receipt," he pronounced.

That tore it. Vannet might want me dead, but I wasn't dying broke. I spun Loritsch around, dug both fists into his god-awful tunic, and hauled him up to my eye level. I braced him against the bulkhead and held him there one-handed while I eased the vibro-blade out of my boot with my free hand.

An activated vibro-blade will cut anything up to and including bone, and he knew it.

"Yeah, well," I said, "this is the Roaq and everybody's got problems. My problem is, I want my money. But don't worry. In the absence of a receipt, your head will do nicely."

"No! Wait!" Loritsch squeaked as I cocked the blade. "The receipt! I remember! I have it here!"

We made sure the receipt was legal and binding and I let go of Loritsch and he left. Roaq was not one of my favorite places, and Vannet wasn't one of my favorite people. I'd made my bones, fifteen years in the business, and having all these greenie tricks tried on me in one day was enough to sour even my amiable disposition. Not even the thought of what Errol was going to say when he saw his *Lady* ship improved it.

I'd go get Pally, then I'd go get my payoff, then I'd go. Period.

It was about an hour back to the crash site at the speed the rolligon crane made, and about halfway there the horizon cut off the primary and the driver sent up a couple floaters for illumination.

"Are you sure this is the place, Captain St. Cyr?" he said a few klicks later.

I jumped down off the side of the rolligon and looked around. There was a trench, and there were the scorchmarks from the *Lady's* cannon. I walked over and kicked gravel into one of the holes made by her landing struts.

Something glittered. I picked it up. Errol's blaster.

I looked around again. No *Firecat*. No tracks, but the rolligon wasn't leaving any either.

"Where the hell is my ship?"

"You know you're going to have to pay for this, don't you? Whether we pick up anything or not? These cranes cost money."

"The hell with your crane! Where's my ship?"

The crew boss regarded me with an expression of wary superiority. "Maybe someone else picked it up? Are you sure you put out markers?"

"Dammit, it was *not* a salvage job it was *my* ship with a current registration and of *course* I put out markers! It hadn't even been here since half-past today!"

"Well," he said, "maybe someone else brought it in. But you're still going to have to pay for the run."

We went back to the Port. No one else had brought in my ship. *Firecat* had vanished.

And Paladin was in her.

I went back to *Light Lady* and tried to think. Paladin would keep quiet, and his power use was low enough to go undetected, but any tech worth his oxygen would see that my navicomp didn't look like any navicomp built in the last thousand years. They put a section on how to recognize logics in the front of every maintenance manual ever printed, and I didn't know how good my cosmetic surgery was. I was going to find out.

The Blue Wulmish was noisy as usual, and the bouncer at the door wanted me to leave my weapons until I told him who I worked for. To say I worked for Vannet was stretching a point more every second, but anything to shut up the hired help. The 'no blasters' rule was a new one since I'd been here last, but then so were a lot of things. I gave my name to a waiter along with a drink order and asked to see Vannet, but it wouldn't go away until I added a five-credit chip to the message.

Eventually the rude mechanical came back with my drink and told me Vannet could give me about half a gram of his precious time and would I walk this way, please?

Well, that's an old joke, and I ducked around and lost the 'tronic in the crush, went nice and quiet up the manual stairs and in without it to advertise me. As the door hissed shut I leaned against the wall and didn't quite draw my blaster.

"Good evening, gentlelizards," I said to Vannet and Olione. "Where's my money." And my ship.

"Good evening, Captain St. Cyr," said Vannet in his best wide-open-grave voice. "I hope you are suffering no ill effects from your most recent misfortune?"

There were a number of ways you could take that. "Nothing that money won't cure." Kroon Vannet was Oob's agent on Roaq, and as rough, nasty, and ambitious as you could expect. I didn't like him, and not just because he was a double-dealing lizard with anti-mammal prejudices. Vannet took *Firecat*, or knew who had.

But I was still alive, so whoever had Pally didn't know it. Yet. The head-price on a logic, as I've said before, can buy you off any crime in the Calendar.

"And when did you start playing to an audience?" I went on, looking pointedly at Olione. He glared right back. We weren't precisely best buddies.

"I was awaiting your call, Captain," said Vannet. He waved Olione out. I saluted the departing lizard with my free hand. My drink sloshed.

Vannet and I stared at each other for a while.

"The chobosh was in rather poor condition," he said, which was a dam'all weak opening gambit and not what I'd expect from a thug of his caliber.

"Must have happened after it left me. Your comptroller accepted the cargo and signed it out as satisfactory."

That seemed to surprise the lizard leader. "You have the receipt?"

I waved it at him and wondered how Loritsch's future in the industry looked.

Vannet gave me the money without a fuss, lizard to the bone, and that surprised me. I dropped the plaques into my shirt and tactfully broached the other subject of my visit.

"By the way, Vannet, someone stole my ship this afternoon. What did you do with it?"

Vannet wrinkled his forehead skin. "Your ship? Your ship is in dock, and has been for most of the day. As the fees are high, I suppose you will be leaving soon."

If I could only figure out what planetary use my poor beat-up converted intra-system shuttle was to the gangboss of half a sector I'd die a happy woman. As it was, I was getting a nasty feeling I was shaping for best two out of three.

"My ship was scattered across the desert about fifty klicks from here. The ship in the Double-A is Captain Lightfoot's."

"Ah. Captain Lightfoot. A charming conversationalist, but he no longer has any use for a ship. I do not deal kindly with those who interfere in my business. You would do well to remember that, Captain St. Cyr."

So Errol was dead and Vannet was getting his dialog from grade-xot thrillers and real soon now someone was going to take my Best Girl into little pieces and find Paladin.

"Well gosh," I said, "I will certainly try to bear that in mind." I set my glass down in the middle of his desktop and eased out. Nobody jumped me on the stairs, in the bar, or on the street outside.

One, Vannet had Paladin and didn't know it.

Two, he'd offed Errol the Peril, which was uneconomic, undiplomatic, and bad for business, though perfectly understandable.

Three, Imperial Governor General Mallorum Archangel was still going to show up here in the morning.

I went up the street wearing eyes in the back of my head.

If I was here when Archangel started rousting people I'd be dead. But I wasn't leaving without Paladin. You don't run out on your friends.

My layup was the same esoteric little grogshop I remembered; a place where a clever independent lass could see somebody's whole life pass before her eyes — for the right price. I scored on some darktrade battledrugs to intensify my chances of breathing till horizonfall, and taped a nice long letter to Oob telling him what I'd been up to since last we met. There weren't many Gentry in the place, but I found a citizen who'd be willing to post it somewhere Vannet wasn't reading my mail. Assured of spreading starshine, I settled down to my own problems.

Vannet had a private dock at Rialla. I'd been out there once, the first run I'd made into Roaq. Rialla was a flashy exurb of Roaq City, and Vannet's big white house covered about as much desert as the port. Since *Firecat* wasn't at the port — I'd spread enough credit to be sure of that — she had to be at Rialla.

It would make my life much easier if my ship and my partner were at Rialla. I didn't think about what I'd do if they weren't.

It was a couple of hours till dawn when I paid off the cab and walked up to the service entrance of Vannet's pride 'n' joy. I didn't dare park a 'speeder anywhere around here, much as I was going to need one later. Just because I couldn't see the security didn't mean it wasn't there.

The street seemed pretty deserted. Too damn deserted for after hours in the high-priced spread, but I was already using all my worrying and all I asked of life was that Vannet still be down at the Wulmish pulling the wings off pilots.

I got past the sensors and the patrol remote and thought rock-thoughts as I scuttled across the yard, found the dock access, and zapped it a short burst.

The underground corridor opened onto a fascinating vista of cranes, ma-

chinery, and my Best Girl hung up in the middle of it with most of her hull-plating off. The lights were up, but there was no one around.

This was weird. One landing strut was all over the floor in pieces, sheared bolts and all, and the other two were still jammed up into the body of the ship. From what I could see, the drive hadn't even been touched — just some blankets thrown over it to stop leaks.

I was stalling and I knew it. I climbed inside.

Paladin was right where I'd left him, bolted into the deck of the cockpit well.

"Hello, Butterfly," he said, sounding dam'all cheerful for no reason I could see. "It certainly took you long enough."

"I can't turn my back on you for a minute. 'Stay out of trouble,' you said. 'Don't rescue anybody.' And what the hell's going on here, anyway?" I was glad my voice sounded steady.

"Well, to start with, you've been promoted."

"Promoted," I said as I started working. Like a bright girl I'd brought a pry-bar with me. Paladin came out easily this time.

"To interstellar contract assassin."

"Wrong," I said. "Guild dues are too high." I looked around for my toolbox, which contained the socket-cap for the cables, my comlink, and a number of other useful items.

"Your toolbox is right where you left it. Nothing's been touched. Do you know why you've been promoted to —"

"I don't do wetwork. There's no money in it." I unhooked the cable that tied Paladin into *Firecar*'s defunct systems, and screwed the socket-cap into place. Then I put on the comlink.

"You haven't been listening," Paladin said through the comlink. "Oob sent you here to ice Vannet."

I stopped in the middle of peeling off my jacket and stared at my partner. Had someone scrambled Pally's brains while I wasn't looking? How was I going to fly the *Light Lady* out of here without numbers I could trust?

"Pally," I said carefully, "Oob sent me here to haul chobosh."

"That's not what Vannet thinks. And he's got a reason. He — There's someone coming."

I hastily stuffed twenty kilos of logic into the sling attached to my jacket and yanked the jacket back on. Then I had just enough time to get back and stuff the two of us into *Firecar*'s empty landing strut casing as our visitors walked through the door.

"But I was *explaining* that to you, Olione m'old darling —"

Errol Lightfoot, big as life and twice as natural, strolled into the room. He didn't look much like a prisoner, even with Olione waving a blaster at him. He didn't look particularly dead, either. Vannet had lied to me, and after all we'd meant to each other, too.

"You must find proof of the woman rebel's connections for Vannet to give

the Governor General," said Olione flatly. "Vannet has arranged to keep her on Roaq, and he wishes to deliver her alive. Do not force him to wait too long. You will continue searching this ship until you have found her letters of marque."

"See?" said Paladin in my ear. "I told you."

Errol? *Errol* had been taking apart my ship? Errol could barely change the filter in his own coffeemaker.

"Oh, don't worry your pretty little head," Errol told Olione blithely. "I'll find them."

Or make them up. First wetwork, now piracy. And just how did Vannet think I could pirate a ship from something the size of *Firecat*? As for my mythical rebel connections, the one thing a rebellion has is no money. I'm not in business for my health.

And I still couldn't believe they'd let Errol anywhere near my ship.

"Just *think* how delighted Prince Mallorum will be at the chance to hold a public execution! Why, he'll probably make Vannet governor of *two* sectors!"

"Find the letters, Fenshee. Now."

*Firecat* rocked back and forth in her docking cradle as Errol mounted the makeshift ramp, and I tried to hold onto the inside of the landing strut casing.

It didn't work, not with twenty kilos of black box overbalancing me. I had the presence of mind to fall face down and really knock the wind out of myself. Olione spun on me, swung his blaster down to cover me —

And Errol godlost Lightfoot leaned out of *Firecat*'s hatch and threw a demagnetizer at Olione. His blaster went off with a disappointed pop. Mine didn't. It made a hell of a lot of noise.

"Why Butterflies-et-cetera," said Errol. "How nice of you to drop in. And just when I'd nearly persuaded Vannet to release me for services rendered, too."

I saw the speculative gleam in his eye. "I'll tell him you shot Olione, so don't try whatever you're thinking of."

Errol looked downright sulky. "That's hardly kind."

"I know you."

"And someday you *must* tell me from where. But meanwhile, would it be too much to ask what you're doing here — if you haven't come to throw yourself on my mercy, that is."

The numbers were against my getting out of there unnoticed, and I didn't want anybody admiring the spectacle of the plucky Gentrymort braving Certain Death to bag back an infinitely-replaceable navicomp. Any lousy excuse was better than that. "Rescuing you, dammit," I said. "What the hell were you looking for in there, the Lost Chord?"

"Actually, darling, I hadn't the faintest idea, but once I convinced them that Oob had sent you here to kill Vannet to prevent him from selling Oob to



Mallorum Archangel in return for a Sector Governorship —”

“I don’t want to hear any more of this. Let’s get the hell out of here.”

“An admirable prudence, but far too late, Captain St. Cyr.” And there was Vannet, holding the biggest meanest hand blaster I’d ever seen, with a bunch of sideboys all looking rough and nasty and ready for death. Somebody else’s. Vannet stretched his mouth at me in imitation of a smile, revealing bony yellow ridges where teeth should have been.

“I can explain this,” Errol began.

“He’s lying,” I added.

Vannet actually shrugged. “It hardly matters now. Drop your weapons, both of you. You have an appointment.”

The demagnetizer hit the floor, and so did my blasters in their leather. If I’d touched the butt of either one he’d have burned me on the spot.

“There’s no profit in killing us, Vannet.”

“No more talk. Against the wall, mammals, or I burn you where you stand.”

I made as if to step out of my gunleather, and stopped. I shot a glance over my shoulder at Errol, pooched out my lower lip and widened my eyes.

“Move!” Vannet growled.

I took a deep breath. “Please, Vannet — just let me kiss him — one last time?” I said in an unsteady voice. I was glad I couldn’t see Errol’s face and wished Pally weren’t listening. “I — I love him, you know. That’s why I came.”

Vannet swallowed it. He didn’t shoot me. And he nodded.

“Enjoy yourself, mammal,” he sneered. Good old Vannet.

I turned to Errol and tilted my face up to his. I put my arms around his neck. His arms slipped around my waist under the vest and flightjacket. In the instant before our lips touched I whispered the words I’d been longing to say.

“Right inside vest pocket — the blaster.”

After a minute I wondered what the hell was taking him so long. He seemed to have forgotten all about my hideout blaster and was certainly giving full attention to my cover story. Errol never did have any sense of priorities.

Just about the time I was about to try for my blaster myself, and Vannet was running out of patience, amusing primate sex or no, Errol straightarmed me out of the way and opened up on everybody in sight.

The six shots the hideout was good for was enough to take out four of the sideboys and for Vannet and selected seconds to fade. We beat it the hell out of there, which was no joy with Pally’s 20K on my back, and ended up somewhere neither of us had seen before. Since nobody seemed to be chasing us, we stopped to get our bearings.

“You can stop doing that, darling,” Errol said. “My immunities are all up to date.”

I stopped wiping my mouth with the back of my hand and wondered how long Errol was going to buy my rescue story once he'd had time to think about it.

"Do you always travel with a computer?" he asked politely, nodding at the lump under my flightjacket.

"It keeps me from getting lost. Now how do we get out of here?"

"You're the one with the navicomputer . . . which is what you really came back for, isn't it darling? Now, I have to ask myself, what could there possibly be about it that's so valuable?"

There was no useful answer to that, but I was trying to think of one when I realized I had it in the first place.

"It's about time you thought of that," Pally said in my ear.

Being smirked at by a smartass logic in front of a crazy Fenshee I did not need. I was even gladder that Errol couldn't hear Paladin.

"May one inquire," said Errol, "what it is, precisely, you are doing?"

"Listening for a weather report," I said, tapping my earplug. "Did you mean all that back there?"

"This?" said Errol, slinking closer.

I scuttled out of the way. "The part about Archangel, my sudden case of treason, all that."

"I'm looking," said Paladin through the comlink. "I thought I had maps of Rialla, but I can't seem to find them."

I had a mad urge to tell him to look under the bed, but managed to concentrate on my conversation with Errol.

"Oh. Well," said Errol. "Naturally I never believed for a moment that you were capable of such things, but Vannet did want to know what I was doing here, so naturally I had to explain that I'd heard Oob the Tusk was sending you to assassinate him and I'd come to warn him."

"Out of the goodness of your heart."

"And the reward. It was my chobosh, and since you wouldn't be needing the money —"

"Take the left-hand turning at the 'T' up ahead."

I walked off. Errol might live in a world all his own, but even he was going to notice something sooner or later. I only hoped it was later.

"Where are you going?"

"Back to my ship." Let him think about that for a while.

Not too long later the three of us — Errol, Paladin, and me — were standing staring at a blank wall.

"The map shows a stair to the surface here," Paladin insisted.

"It looks like a dead end," I said.

Errol looked superior. "My dear child, that is because you don't understand how crime lords think. Now, there is obviously a way to the surface here, or why build a long corridor without any doors leading off of it?"

"There must be a way out," Paladin and Errol insisted almost in chorus. Errol pulled out the blaster he'd liberated from one of Vannet's stooges and aimed at the middle of the wall.

"Errol, don't do this," I suggested without much hope.

"Follow me!" said Errol when the smoke had cleared, and having nothing better to do I followed him up the expected stairs, where he blew a door off its hinges with more immediate success and we found ourselves in the middle of a lizard pantry with a collection of cooks gawping at us.

"This way!" said Errol, and dashed through them toward the nearest door.

I followed and skidded out into the middle of Vannet's dining room. It was full of far too many uniforms, but by this point reasoned cogitation was an active drawback, so we simply shot at them and ran.

"Oh, Butterfly, I don't think you should have done that —"

"Shut up and run!"

We dodged through the common room as the toodamn many people in uniforms came pouring out, shooting at us, each other, and Vannet's guards. So much for the lizard-king's dreams of glory. Archangel wouldn't touch him now.

By the time I got to the front door Errol was nowhere in sight.

"Errol!" I did not need this.

"Darling," said the bush beside me, "I am almost persuaded that you *do* care. Now, what shall we do?"

The floods and floaters had gone on, and there were sirens. Real Soon Now the *legitimates* were going to show up to see what was bugging solid citizen Kroon Vannet.

"I don't know."

"Well, then," said Errol, "we'll just have to improvise."

He took off in a low crouch in the direction of the garage.

"Wait!" I said, but it was no use. I swore and followed him.

The astute observer will wonder why I didn't take that sterling chance to ditch Errol and run. There were a number of reasons, one of which was that no plans I'd had had counted in all this Imperial heat, and another being that Errol had the certified luck of the ungodly, which was what it was going to take to get out of this.

I caught up with Errol just about the time he was taking on the chauffeurs and bodyguards near the garage. We took one of the yachts for cover, and when a stray shot set it afire and it blew it sort of disheartened the home team. They pulled back and dug in behind the formal rock garden, and we made it inside. I struggled out of my jacket-and-black-box combo and wondered how to prepare for a last stand while Errol jumped into the largest, flashiest open saloon, the one with the flags on the hood and the crest in the door, and started trying to key in an ignition sequence.

I looked out the garage door. The bad guys were bringing up some equip-

ment from the main house. It was out of range of my blasters.

"Wouldn't something less conspicuous be more sensible?" suggested Paladin.

"How in god's name are we going to be inconspicuous?" I demanded.

"Got it!" crowed Errol. I heaved Pally in and dived in after him as Errol gunned the drive. "Inconspicuous?" he went on serenely. "I'm surprised at you, darling. Surprise is our ally."

"Yeah? Well, how are we going to get your surprise out of here? There's two limos in the way and —"

"Watch this," said Errol. He set the controls for Full Repel, spun the limo halfway around, and drove out through the wall. The back end dropped with a crash that loosened my teeth. He swept it around in a wide arc and headed for the small circle of friends in the rock garden.

Errol was in his element, and I was hanging on to Paladin for dear life. I only hoped Errol'd stop having fun long enough to remember we were supposed to be escaping.

We were moving too fast for them to get the range and all the shots went wild. Finally they cut and ran, and Errol threw the stick over at the last minute and we just lost the starboard running lanterns and a chunk of the body — and ran right over their tripod mount cannon, which was what he'd had in mind in the first place.

Errol pulled the saloon around again and headed for the house. "Take over," he said briskly, and climbed onto the tail deck.

I let go of Paladin and dove across the bench, managing to grab the controls before we hit anything. "What the *hell* do you think you're doing?"

"I've got a little present for Vannet," Errol shouted, and out of the corner of my eye I saw him make a twisting motion and then throw something.

I knew what it was, too. "Errol — DON'T!"

But it was too late. I jerked the saloon around again and redlined it for the gate. About halfway there the shockwave picked us up and punched us through. I heard metal tear and the desert went whiter than white.

In the *other* pocket of my vest I'd been carrying a military-rated proton grenade, just for luck. It had vanished in the excitement and now I knew how.

All I could see were green and gold spots that kept moving, but I thought I remembered where the road was and I didn't want to let Errol at the controls again. Eventually the lightshow died and I could see I'd got us on the outside loop heading for the port.

"Now that that's taken care of, we'd better get out of here," said Errol briskly. "I'll drive."

"Oh no you won't. What in the name of back taxes possessed you? It'd be okay if it was just Vannet, but you probably fragged half the GG's staff back there."

"Oh, but you were driving. And it was your grenade," said Errol piously,

sliding into the passenger seat.

"You *planned* that!"

" 'Plan' is such a harsh word. I prefer to think of myself as a vehicle of divine inspiration; an agent of fate to confound the unrighteous. Besides, I had the grenade."

"You're completely unscrupulous, you know." Fun was fun, but this was treason, and most of the places the Pax Imperador didn't run, I was wanted for something else.

"Scruples," said Errol, patting me on the head, "are so limiting."

"So where do we go now?" I asked.

"There's Wanderweb."

"Uh . . . no." I was wanted on Wanderweb. "Port Mantow?"

"Well-l-l — there might be a small inconvenience to that."

Uh-huh. "We could go to Hakbar," I said. "Factor Oob'd probably let you have the value of the chobosh. And square it with your backers. If I asked him. He's going to need 'leggers. If Vannet's still alive there'll be war, and if he isn't, there's the headprice."

"I have always depended on the kindness of strangers," Errol said grandly. "I hope you have taken good care of my ship, we're going to need a fast getaway."

And I had intended to be far, far away when he saw the *Light Lady*. Oh, my. "How nice of you to invite me along. The ship's registered to me as salvage, remember?"

"Oh, but you can't mean that," said Errol, putting a careless arm around my shoulders.

"Why not?"

Errol ignored this. "You're going to have to tell me what you did with her sometime."

I supposed I was. For a great mercy, our good-bye gift to Vannet seemed to have iced all pursuit, and even in its battered condition the Imperial saloon was impressive enough to discourage curiosity.

"She's in Double-A One, up on the north end, by the tower."

I didn't even have to show my First ticket to the gate to get into the Port. Uniforms were everywhere, which meant Archangel was down. I hoped they didn't look too close at this saloon. I hoped we didn't run into a 'Shaker when we got topside. I hoped Oob wouldn't decide I was bad for business when we got to Hakbar, and that Errol would remain self-obsessed enough not to look twice at Paladin.

We parked our borrowed chariot in the ground-slip provided outside AA-1. It stopped in a shower of small bits of machinery, collapsed as I cut power to the engines, and died a lingering death there on the paving. You just can't get good speedsters anymore.

Errol didn't let go of me any point down to ship-level. He did let go of me

then, but I wished he'd hung on.

"What's going on?" said Paladin. "Butterfly? I can't see."

I'd ordered maintenance for the *Light Lady* before I'd left. RoaqPort had leaped to the challenge with dazzling promptness.

"*What have you done to my ship?*" Errol lunged for me. I jumped back out of reach.

"I didn't do anything! RoaqPort Services did! They were supposed to, ah, clean her, and um, restock her . . . and flush and recharge her systems . . . and repair the . . ."

And if she was going topside in less than a planetary month I was the Phoenix Empress.

Errol walked over and looked carefully at his ship. "Who'd've thought they came apart into so many pieces?" he said marvelingly.

"That is helpful. That is real helpful."

"You're the one who took her apart, sweetheart. But never mind. I'll just do what I always do in situations like these."

I didn't want to know. "What?"

"Steal another one."

Paladin got us into the bay next door. I didn't want to go out where we'd come in, not with that telltale wreck in the way. With the way my luck had been running since I hit downside I should have known all attempts at caution were doomed.

AA-2 was occupied.

She was long and low and sleek and made any other ship I'd ever seen look like old news. She stretched from end to end of the bay like the darkness visible and her plane surfaces swooped and soared like the wings of night. She was black crystal decadence nose to tail and I could see myself reflected in her hull.

"Now this is more like it," said Errol with relish.

She was the Twice-Born Imperial Governor General Lord Mallorum Archangel's battleyacht.

"Errol," I said, "not even you." I headed for the lift out of the bay, but Errol didn't move.

All of my very best escapes are foiled by lunatics and next time I will take the hint and stay in my cell.

"Errol," I said gently, tugging on his sleeve, "that is the Governor General's private yacht. It is bomb-proof, weather-proof, contains nine essential vitamins and iron, and you can't stand there looking at it until they take you away. You can't get in. Not even you."

"No." Errol looked at me consideringly. "But you can, with that electronic lockpick of yours."

"He's right," Paladin told me. "I can tell it I'm Archangel himself. It'll believe me."

"Do you know what you're saying?" I said.

"I always know what I'm saying. You got us in here. You can get us in there," Errol said.

"Butterfly, we *have* to. There probably isn't another small ship in dock you can get to. Sooner or later they'll find the 'speeder. We have to go *now*."

No real navicomputer could get us into that ship or help us fly it once it had.

"Don't you understand?" I said.

"It's not like you to get cold feet this way, darling."

"Of course I understand, Butterfly. Errol doesn't know what I am. Archangel will."

And I had to make the decision. It was a real interesting question. Would Archangel figure out how his yacht had been clouted, and by whom, and could I run far and fast enough?

On the other hand, there was no mystery about the alternative.

"Okay," I said, and pulled the jumper cables out of my jacket.

Once inside we were actually safe; Paladin changed the sequence and no one could get at us. The airlock was intimately lit; wood on the bulkheads and fur on the deck, believe it or don't, and it got better as we cycled inside. The only time I'd seen anything this lux was on the alMayne consular ship, but that was just pure glitterflash. This wasn't.

Errol let out a low whistle and headed for the nearest portable art object.



You could always depend on Errol.

"Keep your mind on your work, Lightfoot." I wondered what the racks were like.

"Come on," said Paladin impatiently, and I headed for the cockpit.

Archangel's ship took a crew of five, but we could dispense with the songbird and the gunner, and I had the number-cruncher strapped to my back. That left two pilots, and though Errol was crazy, he could drive. I found the emergency toolbox and started popping panels. Eventually I found the navicom and hooked Paladin in parallel sequence.

"Better," said Paladin, still in my ear. The cockpit went pitch-black for a moment, then the lights went up to useful levels and the air purifiers kicked in.

"Sorry," said Paladin. "Difference of opinion with the main bank. It's all mine now. Just let me get rid of these engine interlocks. Oh yes, and Roaq City is cooperating with the Governor General's office in the investigation of the murder of civic leader Kroon Vannet earlier today by suspected Tortugan terrorists. They've found the speeder. But they aren't looking for you here, yet."

"They will be."

"Oh, yes. But we won't be here then. Butterfly, what are you going to do about Errol?"

I was saved from that one by the appearance of the body in question, who had apparently taken the time for a detailed tour of inspection and a lightning change of clothes. If Errol was any indication, Archangel did not deny himself in the pursuit of Galactic peace. Errol glittered. And his taste in clothes was as impractical as ever.

"Well," he said briskly, "is everything ready?" He slid into the mercy seat and looked around expectantly.

"Power to the main boards," said Paladin. I crawled out from under the console and into the worry seat.

"Power up," I said, and the cockpit came to life.

We made a textbook exit from the Roaq. We told them we were Archangel, and even if they knew better they didn't dare argue. It was a bit of an anticlimax after Rialla, but Errol, Paladin, and I had just each and severally bought in on more trouble than we'd ever live to have.

"And now, my darling," Errol began, "now that we are safe —"

"Safe? *Safe?* When there's not one damn place in the galaxy we can take this thing?"

"Oh, nonsense." Errol waved his hand grandly. "There's always Grand Central. I'm sure Mallorum would be happy to reward a friendly soul who returned this very expensive yacht of his."

"I don't think that's a very good idea, Butterfly," said Paladin through the comlink.

"No," I said numbly.



"And now, my darling," Errol repeated, turning the full force of his personality on me, "you must forget these niggling little objections and let me tell you all about myself."

"I already know everything about you I need to know."

"But how could you? We've only met. In another time, perhaps, another reality —"

I got up out of my chair. "Do you happen to remember a planet called Granola and the Great Crusade you conned up?"

Instant comprehension. Finally.

"But of course! Darling! After all these years!" Errol leaped to his feet. "Just think of all we have to talk about." He moved toward me.

I put a chair between us. "Errol, you sold me on the block at Market Garden twenty years ago. What can you possibly say?"

This stopped him for all of five seconds.

"But darling," said Errol reasonably, "I needed the money."

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Side by side on the hard ground,  
we lay blubbered up in our parkas  
in the lee of the old Madaket farm house.  
The galaxy in Orion's sword shown bright.  
Halley an easy blur to find —  
out of Pisces' circlet toward Aquarius.  
So it was cheating for me, though fair,  
to site M-31 by the roof board,  
since Timalyne at 12 was less familiar  
with turn of lens and spill of stars.  
I can't really say I knew the heavens better.  
But who can, considering how long  
their pale light journeyed to join us?  
Considering that though father and daughter,  
sharing the binoculars like prospectors  
with their last canteen,  
we are sometimes as far apart  
as neighboring galaxies.  
Each barely visible to the other,  
even on cold clear nights.

— Robert Frazier

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